LILITH

SPRING 1997 THE INDEPENDENT JEWISH WOMEN'S MAGAZINE Vol. 22, No. 1 $4.50

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ne lives of
ERUSALEM'S
WESOME
OMEN

A Muslim feminist reclaims HAGAR

SOPHIE TUCKER was sexy, ripe and out there. How'd she get away with it?

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VOLUME 22, NO. 1

LILITH

SPRING 1997

Lilith is named for the legendary predecessor of Eve who insisted on equality with Adam. After the Holy One created the first human being, Adam, the Holy One created a woman, also from the earth, and called her Lilith. Lilith said: "We are equal because we both come from the earth. . . ."
(From *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, 23a-b)

10 SINGLE-SEX SCHOOLS—HOW WELL DO THEY SERVE GIRLS?
by Sarah Blustain
Paradoxically, just as the most progressive Jewish schools are more committed than ever to coeducation, there's a push (based on the work of Carol Gilligan and others) to create all-girls public schools. What's the risk?

14 MAGGID: THE TELLING
by Bonnie Theiner

"Ich Bin a Yid." What Grandpa told Pharaoh in 1945, and how a tape recorder transformed his story into sacred text last Passover. You can do it too.

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A poem by Andrea Adam Brott
Subtle questions of race disrupt a lifetime of friendship.

18 IN PRAISE OF FAMOUS WOMEN: A WALKING (OR ARMCHAIR) TOUR OF JERUSALEM
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"She is in bed/with the juice from a cyprus tree/ . . . She is in bed with a country," writes Blatt in her love poem to Israel.

26 MY MUSLIM ANCESTOR HAGAR
by Azizah Y. al-Hibri
Jewish women aren't the only ones writing feminist midrash. Here, a Muslim woman beautifully re-imagines Hagar's life (and Sarah's). Plus . . . the Qur'anic etiology of female genital mutilation and the author's response: revulsion.

30 SEXY SOPHIE TUCKER'S CONFUSING LEGACY
by Joyce Antler

Critics called the vaudevillian "big, gawky, entirely lacking in 'allure,'" but Tucker's robust sexuality—her "red-hot mama" persona—liberated audiences' imaginations.

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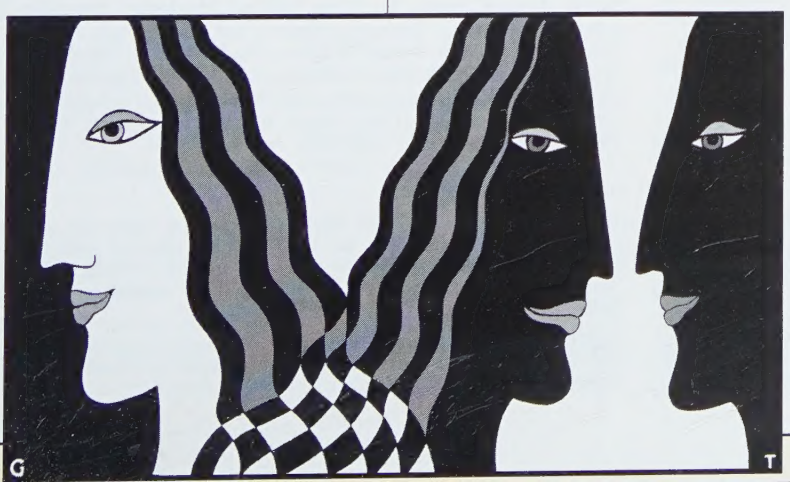

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COVER ART BY GUNTER TEMECH

FROM THE EDITOR

This is a season for anniversaries. LILITH's 20th continues, with a standing-room only forum on Jewish feminism held at the 92nd Street Y in New York. And Israel's 50th is about to begin.

The Y event (which garnered LILITH fabulous media attention in The New York Times and other periodicals, and internationally on CNN) featured LILITH authors Paula Hyman, Nessa Rapoport and Nechama Liss-Levinson on "Evaluating Two Decades of Activism: How Far Have We Come? Where Do We Want to Go?" Watch the next issue of LILITH to sample the outstanding presentations.

To help mark our 20th anniversary, LILITH has created special mini-anthologies of articles from the magazine. We are often asked to custom-make these for academic courses and informal adult-education classes; recently we've had so many requests from LILITH readers for copies of previous wonderful articles that we're now giving you an opportunity to order these for yourself. Check out the two amazing collections available with the order form on page 13: one on new wedding ideas, the other on new rituals and celebrations for all the moments in your own life—and on the Jewish calendar—when you want to mark the occasion with authentically new traditions. Also back by popular demand is LILITH's Lens on Jewish History, the timeline poster created to show the important developments in Jewish women's lives over the two decades LILITH has been publishing (plus those that came in the five millennia before LILITH). You can have your own pristine poster by sending $20 to LILITH; call (888) 2-LILITH.

And in a look ahead—LILITH has through the years presented outstanding coverage of women's issues in Israel—the role of women in the Israeli army, the lives of Ethiopian women in Israel today, the ongoing political struggles for women's rights in the Jewish state, and more. To kick off our coverage for Israel's 50th anniversary, we bring you an unusual feature on Jerusalem. We've asked two Jerusalemites to guide LILITH readers on an intimate walking tour of sites in the Holy City of special interest to Jewish women. The authors pledge to continue their peripatetic explorations in forthcoming issues of LILITH, knowing that there are more and more fascinating and significant women where these come from.

When we asked Muslim activist Azizah al-Hibri (whom some of you saw on the PBS Genesis series) to write about Hagar, we were taken aback by the powerful connection she describes between Sarah's jealousy of her fertile handmaiden and the hideous phenomenon of female genital mutilation. Some Muslim texts claim that the practice originated with Sarah, who disfigured Hagar—with Abraham's permission. Al-Hibri shares with us a Muslim woman's outrage at how Sarah, honored in both Abrahamic religions, could be used by male commentators as the excuse for justifying this cruelty. Al Hibri's article marks the first time a Muslim feminist has written for LILITH, and we welcome her to these pages.

Susan Weidman Schneider

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LETTERS

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POWERFUL NAMES

I was pleased and honored to have my piece, "The Pronunciation of My Name," included in your article on Jewish women and their names ("Each of Us has a Name," Winter 1996). I am, however, a bit surprised with one alteration. When referring to the man with whom I spent time in Morocco, I used the word lover. My time with him was a fleeting travel affair. In the article, my word, lover, was changed to "my boyfriend." This phrase is not one that I have used since the 6th grade, and it hardly characterizes the situation of a 24-year-old Jewish woman and a 46-year-old Moroccan man spending a few weeks together. Has the independent Jewish women's magazine gone timid on me? Is not the mythical Lilith known for her inability to be confined by concepts like "boyfriend"? Doesn't Lilith prove to be a match for the likes of Adam, King Solomon, and Elijah the Prophet? In any case, I don't think that Lilith has boyfriends, and neither do I.

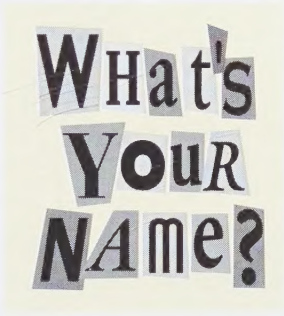
Rachel S. Havrelock
San Francisco, CA

When I got married two-and-a-half years ago, I went through a great deal of decision-making regarding the name-change question. I didn't just want to take my husband's name, but I did not want only to keep mine, either. I also did not want to hyphenate my name. So, I chose to keep my maiden name as my middle name à la Laura Ingalls Wilder and Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Surprisingly, this proved to be very confusing for people: no one seemed to know how to read my new name, how to alphabetize it, whether both names were combined, or whether the hyphen was just missing. I now use my maiden name as my journalism byline, but otherwise almost always use my married name.

My husband had wanted us to hyphenate our names together. However, his name is Sandy—usually perceived as feminine—and we agreed that a hyphenated name combined with Sandy would result in even more mail inadvertently addressed to Mrs. rather than Mr.

Sharon Goldman Edry
New York City



My mother told me in the early '50s, when I was about five years old, that every third baby born in the world was Chinese. Since I was her third baby, she said my name was Ming Toy. For the next 20 years, I thought my English name was Marcy, my Hebrew name was Miriam, and my Chinese name was Ming Toy. I would sometimes even write it on my name tag at Federation meetings when I felt humorous: "Ming Toy Tatken Berry Feldman." When I was 25 years old, I was telling someone this story. My mother overheard me and said she had no recollection of telling me this. As an afterthought she added, "What a funny thing to tell a kid!" (So for 20 years, I thought fortune cookies were part of my heritage!)

*Marcy Miriam Tatken**
*Berry**Feldman****
Huntington Woods, MI

* father's last name
** step-father's last name
*** husband's last name
What's wrong with this picture?

Well, it just goes to show that some grief never totally disappears no matter how much time or distance intervenes. When I saw the title you imposed on my essay in "Each of Us Has a Name," the helpless pain and howling rage of childhood returned, only now the playing field is a national publication.

Editors generously spent time reviewing with me changes in the text. Why was the title, the first line after all, exempt from that process?

Using my old nickname instead of the title I wrote is artistically inappropriate and to do so without my knowledge or consent is, in my opinion, unprofessional as well. One of the themes of my essay is the power that derives from the act of naming. You abused yours and owe me an apology.

Maxine Silverman a.k.a
Meira bat Avraham v' Tsufit
Upper Nyack, NY

I always hated my name growing up. My first name, Lillian, belonged to another generation. My surname, Mutter, was also an embarrassment for obvious reasons—just think of all the possibilities!

During my divorce in 1982, I did not want to keep my soon-to-be-ex-husband's surname, and I sure as hell didn't want to return to my childhood name. After months of consideration, I decided to take my maternal grandmother's childhood name—or so-called "maiden" name—which symbolized the three overriding principles in my life: family, Judaism, and feminism.

Although anglicized, Jessula is drawn from within my own family. In choosing this name, I feel I am in some way perpetuating my maternal grandparents' small community of Greek Jews who were decimated during the Holocaust. The Jews of Ioannina are Romaniote Jews, neither Ashkenazic nor Sephardic. Greek-speaking, they are descended from Byzantine Jews who settled in the northwest region of Greece sometime in the eighth century.

Lili R. Jessula
Richardson, TX

FEMINISM CRITIQUED

I was astonished at the hostility you expressed toward my book, *In the Image of God: A Feminist Commentary on the Torah* ("The Genesis List," Winter 1996). It is absolutely untrue that I have "nothing but scorn for Jewish feminists." I am Jewish and have been a feminist for 30 years. My critique of feminist views of Judaism does not make me anti-feminist any more than my critique of Jewish sexism makes me anti-Semitic.

The quote you cited about abuse in Jewish families, implying that I minimize its effects, occurs in the midst of a discussion of why many Jewish women are alienated from

CALL FOR MATERIALS

For an upcoming LILITH issue about **ORDINARY OBJECTS** that hold —for whatever reason—**GREAT MEANING** for you, please send your account (long or short) of your precious thing (and your relationship with it) to: LILITH, 250 W. 57th Street #2432, NY, NY, 10107; or fax it to: 212-757-5705; or email us at: lilithmag@aol.com

Judaism. My point was that it is not always the Torah and Jewish theology that cause this alienation; but because Judaism is so centered on home and family, all it takes sometimes is an abusive Jewish parent to make a Jewish girl want nothing to do with Judaism. I myself grew up with a violent father, and it distresses me greatly that anyone should think I would ever minimize the effects of familial abuse.

My book, however, is not about Jewish feminism. The book's thesis is that the Torah improved women's status in the ancient Near East because pagan religion (including goddess worship) was cruel and sexually exploitative.

I cite several articles in LILITH, but at no time do I belittle any author or the magazine. I am challenging ideas, not trashing the individuals who hold them.

Judith Antonelli
Brookline, MA

THE RABBIS' BIAS

After seeing "Sugar and Spice—and Beyond: A Jewish Feminist Take on Children's Books" (Fall 1996), it occurred to me that the male literary role models that may have influenced me were not Jewish, either (or at least did not suffer from Jewish conflicts). Thinking back over my education, I can see why. My elementary- and high-school teachers never would have dared teach a book with Jewish conflicts because of the ever-present tension between the *rebbeim* and the secular teachers in the schools And the *rebbeim* certainly would never "waste" their time teaching novels.

Nevertheless, I think that novels that deal with Jewish conflicts are a precious few, most of which you cite, and that my not having been influenced by any of them is representative of many yeshiva high school students that I know. Thus I think your criticism is misplaced; I think that there is a lack of good novels exploring modern Jewish topics conflicts altogether, be they centered around male or female characters.

Avi Shmidman
New Haven, CT

EMPOWERING CHOICE

I enjoyed reading "Jewish Single Mothers by Choice" [Spring 1996] and respect the right of single women to have children. I have some difficulty, however, with your uncomplimentary description of their decision-making process. They are presented as women who make a choice to be a single parent because they cannot find a mate.

This article could have been more meaningful to any woman contemplating a decision to have a child if the author had presented this monumental step from an empowering perspective: women talking about their roles and adjustments to being a single parent; women describing the different issues involved in adoption versus pregnancy; and women discussing how they view their children's adjustments to this family structure.

Lynda S. Giles
Bloomfield, MI

USEFUL SCHOLARSHIP

In the debate over Jewish women's studies ("Constructing the Jewish Feminist Pantheon," Winter 1996) and its usability beyond academe, I say yes, we need both more Jewish feminist scholarship and more ways to translate this work into liturgy, curriculum, organizing ideas, events and more. Not only for adults, but for Jewish children too. We need to be organizing Rosh Hodesh groups for girls, introducing feminist midrash in day schools and Hebrew schools, bringing our children to feminist seders.

One piece of this "translation" is happening now, as Jewish educators transform the past 20 years of Jewish feminist scholarship into curricula for Jewish kids in day schools, museums, and Hebrew schools. Beginning in 1994, The Shefa Fund has organized an annual funding pool that has granted nearly $50,000 for the creation, testing and distribution of such curricula.

For more information, including how to contribute or apply for funding, contact The Shefa Fund at 215-247-9704 or shefafnd@libertynet.org

Sue Hoffman
Philadelphia, PA

A PEAR TO REMEMBER

I've been a reader for many years and never noticed the absence of a "presence" or identification—the simple, modest, strong, and clear lettering of LILITH seemed distinct enough for me. However, I like the pear logo. I might have suggested a tree, maybe a pomegranate, a fig?—but, hey!! And, in keeping with one of the articles in the current magazine—"What's Your Name?"—I share my own vision of the new logo replete with names of our foremothers.

Zandra Frailich a.k.a. Zelda
North Hollywood, CA

[The LILITH pear logo introduced in our winter issue was created by Charles Blustain and designed by Jean Pekorny. Ed.]

RESPITE FROM RACE

Sarah Blustain's thoughtful article on the children of Jewish and African-American parents ["Are You Black or Are You Jewish? The New Identity Challenge," Fall 1996] missed one important topic: Israel. In my experience at Vassar College, students who spent their junior year in Israel consistently remarked on how it gave them the opportunity to explore other dimensions of their identity, as American Jews and as African-Americans, because they did not have to cope with a society eager to label them or force them to choose one parent and heritage over another.

Deborah Dash Moore
Poughkeepsie, NY

May I, as a South African reader, express how much I enjoy reading and learning from LILITH. It is enlightening and uplifting to read and "participate" with women who are engaged in empowerment—in a positive and constructive way!

Equality before the law and gender equality (separately!)—givens for most LILITH readers—have been entrenched only as of 1996 in the constitution of South Africa (and this, yet to be ratified!). The realization and actualization of the potential and contributing power of women is in its infancy.

We have much to learn reasserting ourselves as women.

Li Boiskin
Cape Town, South Africa

CORRECTIONS

The correct address for the Reading Ruach Book Club is: P.O. Box 175, Fairfax, VA 22039-0175.

The fax number for Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies, is 972-2-679-0840. The e-mail is dvorahg@iol.co.il

The correct address for Women's World is 208 West 30th St., New York, NY 10001.

"WOMAN'S VOICE." TRADITIONALLY, THE VOICE OF THE JEWISH WOMAN WAS NOT TO BE HEARD IN PUBLIC, LEST IT AROUSE MEN. NO MORE. THESE PAGES ARE MEANT FOR NEWS ABOUT JEWISH WOMEN, IN OUR OWN STRONG VOICES.

Sexing the Answering Machine

When Paula Hyman recently was having translated into Hebrew her new book, Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish Life *(see review, page 37), she hit a glitch: there's no word for "gender" in Hebrew.* Migdar *is a newly created word being bandied about in Israel today, and while she used it in the text, she stuck with* nashim, *women, in the title. Tipped off by Hyman's dilemma, LILITH asked an Israeli writer to update us on other changes along that active interface of language and sexism.*

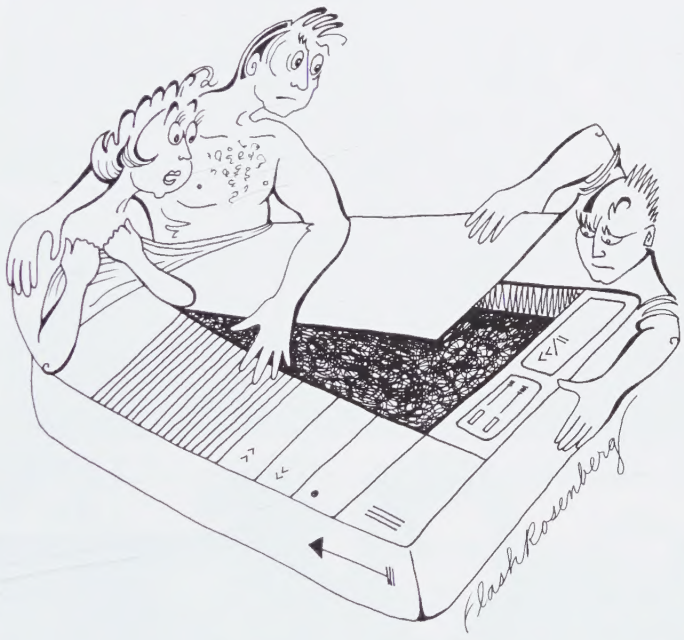
How do you say "telephone answering machine" in the language of the Bible? How, without contorting the language, do you avoid bias when Hebrew grammar divides everything into masculine and feminine?

These are among the tricky questions addressed daily by Israeli linguists and journalists; by the Academy of the Hebrew language, the official arbiter of which words and constructions are in or out; by anyone aware that language makes and breaks stereotypes.

Take "telephone answering machine." Many call it *mazkira elektronit*—literally, "electronic secretary"—with the grammatical form of *mazkira* indicating that the secretary can only be a woman. Also heard, though less frequently, is *meshivon*—literally, "answerer"—and grammatically masculine.

At a recent discussion of the word at the Academy of the Hebrew Language, author Shulamit Hareven made a strong case for *meshivon*. "It's getting a little ridiculous that all the service-providing words are feminine," she said, citing an example of a judge calling someone a *kadanit* (typist, feminine) even through he was a man. The upshot: officially at least, *meshivon* is in, *mazkira electronit* is out.

Hareven, the only woman in the Academy's 30-member plenum, describes another revealing change. A prevalent word for menopause is *blut* (rhymes with suit), which also connotes "worn out, used up, depleted." *Blut* is the biblical word used by Sarah when she learns at age 90 that she is going to have a child: "After my *blut* am I to have pleasure, my husband also being old?" (Genesis 18:12). The Academy has suggested the biologically accurate and judgmentally neutral *hedlon veset*, cessation of menstruation. This is even more precise than the English "menopause," notes Hareven, "pause" indicating only a temporary stop.



Also problematic is the Hebrew word for husband, *ba'al*, which also means "owner, master, ruler" (especially in the sexual sense). Here the Bible suggests an alternative. Metaphorically describing the future ideal relations between God and the people, the prophet Hosea records the divinity as saying "On that day you shall call me *ishi* (my man, my spouse) and not call me *ba'ali* (my master)." And *ishi* it is for a growing number of women.

The Academy has also addressed grammatical issues, if anything even more slippery than vocabulary. In response to queries from the public, the Academy has directed the Education Ministry to word all textbook and exam instructions (*answer, analyze, compare, explain,* etc.) in the inclusive imperative plural rather than the masculine singular that still appears with surprising frequency.

Hebrew—especially army Hebrew—likes acronyms, and the words for Knesset member, general director, first sergeant, second lieutenant, etc. are all such compound terms. The Academy voted for the feminine suffix on the acronym if a woman is doing the job: *mankal* is a man general director, *mankalit* a woman.

Ultimately, even the respected Academy of the Hebrew Language can't legislate what people say or write, and language is a slick and fast-moving target. Whether Israelis will leave messages for the sexual masters on the electronic woman secretary or choose less biased terms still remains to be seen.

—Beth Uval

Beth Uval, who has been living in Jerusalem since 1975, has worked as a freelance writer and translator, and currently works as a writer and guide at Neot Kedumim—The Biblical Landscape Reserve in Israel.

The San Francisco Jewish Film Festival—The Mother of Them All . . .

Following its first screening in 1981, the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival was a "mom-and-mom operation" for the next 12 years. Since its inception, this first among American Jewish film festivals has shown some 400 films—half of them premieres—draws 34,000 viewers annually, and has helped nurture festivals in 40 cities around the world.

With a festival that was a success from the start, founding mother Deborah Kaufman found she was not alone in her attraction to Jewish films as a way of exploring her Jewish identity. A San Francisco-born non-practicing attorney, she says she "couldn't relate to Jewish establishment institutions and events," focused as they were on Holocaust remembrance and Israel Independence Day. Films were "a bridge between the material out there and audiences like me, hungry for secular Jewish identity."

Kaufman brought Janis Plotkin on board as co-director for the festival's second year. Plotkin's own epiphanic connection to Jewish films came during Josh Waletzky's 1980 film "Image Before My Eyes," which resurrected Jewish life in Poland before the Holocaust. Coming from a Polish background, Plotkin could finally see that "Polish Jewry was something other than corpses. It's important to give Jews other images of what we are." The films in the festival, she says, go beyond the Jewish establishment's "triumvirate of identity—religion, Holocaust and Israel."

These days, opening night fills San Francisco's Castro Theatre, a true temple of film worship—Hollywood baroque with Versailles/deco influence. The sexual heat of the annual gay and lesbian film festival, also held in this venue, is replaced by the talking, eating, high-decibel Jews.

The festival remains true to its theme, "Independent Filmmakers: Looking at Ourselves." Last summer Eve Annenberg's "Dogs: The Rise and Fall of an All-Girl Bookie Joint" was among its offerings. The film has a nominally Jewish lead character who convinces her underemployed Lower East Side roommates to join her in a business they can operate out of their kitchen. Asked during the post-screening question period, "Do you know of any Jewish women struggling and poor in New York?," the 30-year-old Annenberg shot back, "Aside from me and my friends?"

Plotkin, who has continued to run the festival since Kaufman left three years ago to produce her own film, says the 17th festival will open in San Francisco July 17, then travel to Berkeley and Palo Alto. The focus will be on American-Jewish identities—spiritual seeking, family relations, black-Jewish relations, including Kaufman's debut film, "Blacks & Jews" (see adjacent page).

The festival team has become a year-round Jewish film resource. With its $400,000 budget and three-person staff, the festival is involved with programming for KQED, San Francisco's public television station, along with the cable Jewish Television Network, and film distribution through Atara Releasing. In 1989, the festival even produced Moscow's first Jewish film festival.

And for anyone inspired to replicate their success, the staff has written a book on how to do it, the *Independent Jewish Film: A Resource Guide;* the recently published third edition includes listings for more than 400 films, subject listings, distributors, and a complete guide to producing a festival. Even with dozens of Jewish film festivals up and running, Kaufman and Plotkin obviously believe that room remains for more mom-and-mom operations.

—Amy Stone

INDEPENDENT FILMMAKERS LOOKING AT OURSELVES
INDEPENDENT JEWISH FILM
A RESOURCE GUIDE
EDITED BY
JANIS PLOTKIN, CAROLINE LIBRESCO, AND JOSH FEIGER

The cover of *Independent Jewish Film: A Resource Guide,* designed by Deb Sibony. At right, festival founder Deborah Kaufman (left) and frestival director Janis Plotkin.

For more information contact: San Francisco Jewish Film Festival 346 9th St., San Francisco, CA 94103; phone (415) 621-0556; e-mail jewish-film@aol.com, or World Wide Web www.sfjff.org. "Independent Jewish Film: A Resource Guide" *is on sale for $20 / $25 Canadian (California residents add $1.65 tax) plus $4 shipping and handling.*

Amy Stone, one of the founders of Lilith magazine, is a journalist living in San Francisco.

. . . Deborah Kaufman in Conversation

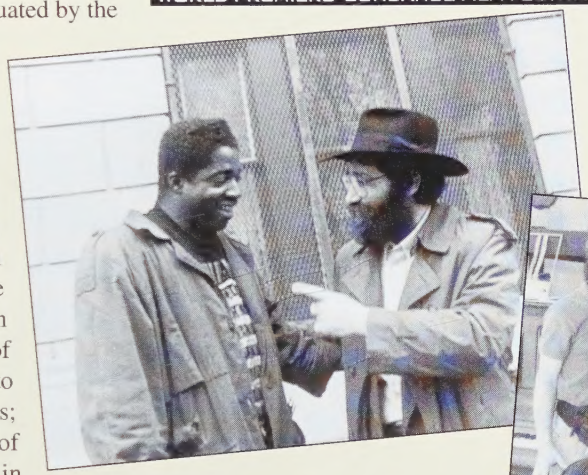
After 13 years of screening independent Jewish films for the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, founder Deborah Kaufman has gone behind the camera to make a film of her own. Teaming up with producers Alan Snitow, a Jewish man, and Bari Scott, a black woman, she has created "Blacks & Jews," a documentary that aims to open up dialogue between the two groups by going beyong the "ritual of conflict" Kaufman says is perpetuated by the clashes of media-minded forces such as Louis Farrakhan and the Anti-Defamation League.

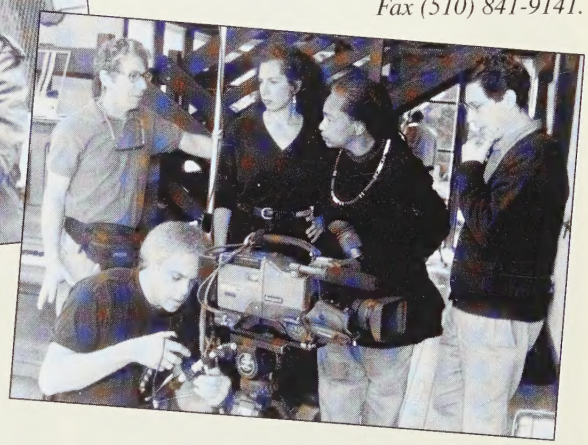
"Blacks & Jews," shown at the Sundance Film Festival of independent films in January and scheduled for screening at the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival this summer, goes for the complexities of the Crown Heights riots; the 1960s selling of a Chicago Jewish neighborhood to blacks unable to get mortgages; blacks who left the Nation of Islam; blacks and Jews in Hollywood; and, most recently, black and Latino high school students kicked out of an Oakland, Calif., movie theater for laughing at "Schindler's List" atrocities during a Martin Luther King Day outing.

Can a documentary help break down hateful stereotypes? Clearly the film's image of a bloodied head of a Hasid—featured on the cover of the New York Post during the Crown Heights riots—will be remembered, even by Jews who feel little kinship with the black-hatted members of the tribe. The layers of black and Jewish distinctions take a long time to peel away, but what Kaufman is aiming at is, for starters, a conversation.

—*A.S.*

For information on the film, contact Snitow-Kaufman Productions, 2600 10th St., Suite 202, Berkeley, CA 94710. (510) 841-1068. Fax (510) 841-9141.





Above, a scene from Kaufman's "Blacks & Jews," in which a black journalist meets the man whose life he saved. On the production set, at right.

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Mothers Reshuffle the Race Card in Crown Heights

It's two days after a jury found Lemrick Nelson guilty of violating Hasidic scholar Yankel Rosenbaum's civil rights, believing prosecutor's claims that Nelson fatally stabbed Rosenbaum during the 1991 Crown Heights riots. The verdict has been received quietly, a far cry from the rioting and looting that made Crown Heights a symbol of New York's racial divisions. Today, a group of black and Jewish mothers and their guests from the Anti-Defamation League make their way through the streets of Crown Heights, stopping at a kosher pizzeria to reflect on the past five-and-a-half years.

WALTER KARLING

Faige Horowitz (fourth from right), executive director of the Crown Heights Jewish Community Council, discussing community collaborations with memebers of Mothers to Mothers and the Anti-Defamation League.

"There was a feeling of hopelessness," says Henna White, recalling the days after the riots. "People didn't know where to turn."

A Hasidic mother of four, White works for the Brooklyn District Attorney's office as a liaison to the borough's large Orthodox community. Immediately after the riots, she brought her mediating skills to her own neighborhood and formed Mothers to Mothers. She gathered the group, which made its first public statements at the ADL gathering this winter, as a way for Lubavitch and African-American women in Crown Heights to learn about each other and overcome the riot's legacy of racism and anti-Semitism.

"I came from South Africa in the height of apartheid, and part of the reason I left . . . [was] because of apartheid," says White. "I came here and I came to the same thing, and it wasn't too much longer until the riots happened. So I feel maybe that [is why] this is the area I've become most involved with—communities getting along."

For five years, 30 women have met once a month in the offices of the Brooklyn District Attorney, working out their differences and realizing they have more in common than they thought. As women devoted to their homes and families, they came to believe that they could remove themselves from the bitterness on the streets.

"We see things a little bit differently than men see it. What drives women is your family, your home. Sometimes what drives men is politics," said Ann Lancaster, a founding member from the African-American community. "I think women just are more direct."

White says the women opened up to each other almost immediately, and she was impressed by how quickly they realized they shared common goals. But still there was the challenge of understanding each other's cultures and traditions. Lancaster recalls a picnic and other child-oriented activities that the group had planned. When Lubavitch boys and girls were restricted in their social contact with members of the opposite sex, Lancaster had to go back to her community and explain it to the children.

"Children sometimes feel, 'If you don't play with me it's because of this,'" she said, pointing to her skin. Once they found out about Orthodoxy's restrictions on contact between males and females, she says, "they were very surprised."

The women say that moments like these—when they take what they've learned from their meetings back to their communities—is where Mothers to Mothers is most effective, and where they as women have the most influence: in the power to shape their children's values. White says that now that the group has created a strong sense of identity, it is ready to embark on public projects such as cooking together for homeless shelters and, with the help of the ADL, developing outreach programs in the schools.

"You're going to teach your children what you yourself have just learned; you're going to teach your neighbors what you yourself have just learned, and it makes for a better community," said Lancaster.

—Sarah Safer

Sarah Safer is a freelance writer living in New York.

Women's Learning: "It's Not a Feminist Issue"

When Rabbi David Silber started the Drisha Institute for Jewish Education in 1978, he says his goal was to give women as strong an education as men were receiving, not to change the place of women in Orthodox Judaism. At the time, he was the only one doing anything like it, and 18 years later, Drisha still holds a unique spot in the world of higher education for Jewish women.

Silber, 48, a modern Orthodox rabbi ordained by Yeshiva University's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, confesses that "I didn't realize at the time I was doing something revolutionary."

FROM THE DRISHA INSTITUTE, NEW YORK

What started as a few part-time classes has blossomed into a school with approximately 450 women taking regular classes or attending periodic public lectures, and yet Silber still holds to his initial goal of providing strong learning, not political change.

"This is not a feminist issue," he says. "It is a community issue. The more thoughtful and knowledgeable men and women we have active in the Jewish community, making good ethical decisions and setting good goals, the better community we have."

Though Drisha provides the opportunity for women to learn Talmud (traditionally texts that women were not taught), the institution has avoided taking a stand on issues controversial in Orthodox circles, such as the legality of women's prayer groups, women serving as *poskot* (experts who make determinations about Jewish law), counting women in a *minyan* or the ordination of women rabbis.

In order to include students from vastly different backgrounds, Drisha bills itself as non-denominational, though it approaches learning from a traditional *halachic* perspective. It has also made it a priority to meet the differing needs of students who walk through its doors. Some are college students taking a single night course, or business people who free up an hour for a "lunch and learn" session. High school students can spend five weeks in the summer learning all day. And New Yorkers who can only take Christmas Day off congregate in the *beit midrash* and pore over Bibles and Talmuds. Reni Dickman, a second year rabbinics student at Hebrew Union College, spent her winter break at Drisha learning and says she never felt uncomfortable about being a Reform Jew.

"Even though we all came from different backgrounds," she notes, "we didn't talk about it. We just studied Torah; nothing else mattered and we were unified in that goal."

Even the certificate awarded to a woman who completes the rigorous Scholar's Circle program, modeled upon the *kollel* (traditionally the "house of study" where men learn full time), avoids any politically laden words and states that "having dedicated three years to the intensive and advanced study of Talmud and Halacha [Jewish Law] . . ., she is hereby deserving of this recognition." Nowhere does the diploma confer a title like "leader," *"poseket"* or "rabbi," though a man finishing up a similarly rigorous program would be well on his way to qualifying for rabbinic ordination. What is stressed is the importance of learning, not titles or labels.

Until Drisha "there has never been an opportunity for traditional women to gain knowledge of central rabbinic texts," says Noa Jeselsohn, who plans to teach Talmud at Pelech, an innovative religious girls' high school in Jerusalem, using skills acquired at Drisha. She began there at 17 and will soon be the fifth Drisha student to graduate from its Scholar's Circle.

"The women we get in our programs are exceptional, but they are all special cases," Rabbi Silber stresses. "The day-school movement is not producing girls with the necessary skills and attitudes who say, 'I want to learn and teach.'" Rabbi Silber hopes that a new Drisha program to train future Jewish day school teachers, created with the Beit Rabban Center for Research in Jewish Education, will help to change that.

Though he has seen changes in attitude in the last 18 years, Silber says it continues to upset him that some women are reluctant to support financially an institution they obviously care about.

"If they took themselves seriously, they'd write bigger checks," he elaborates. "Women are still socialized to see their own learning as being secondary in importance to men's."

—Natalie Blitt

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Sex-Segregated Schools

How Good Are They for Girls?

by Sarah Blustain

Tenth grade, 1985. I have recently confessed the formal onset of puberty, though in fact that milestone was passed nearly a year ago. Down a school hallway lined with lockers, my closest friend, Alice, laughs as she juggles knapsack, coat and violin, chatting with a boy in our class. She is one of the most competent people I know and I am confused when she calls herself a "spaz" and lets him open her locker. It will be some years before I have a name for this: flirting.

It is also this year that I—taking every advanced class—will decide with parents and guidance counselors not to take advanced calculus. It's strategy, we say. We don't expect that I'll do well in math, and a poor mark won't look so good on my transcript.

I wonder, in these years, why the girls act dumb. I notice that they do not speak out in class. I see myself anxious not to speak out, and admire the boys who do: officers of our class, linchpins of the newspaper, leaders of protests to prevent teachers' firings, debaters in class discussions. I sometimes say I wish I were a boy. I am surprised when, despite our reticence, the top five graduates in my senior class are girls.

These observations were not made in hindsight. They were not made with a coy nod at feminism. They were not even informed by the theories of Carol Gilligan, Myrna and David Sadker, Mary Pipher, the American Association of University Women and others who suggest that coeducationals school are ill-serving girls.

But my experiences, and those of many other females, do appear prototypical in the research on girls in school, and they have found their way into the spotlight in both Jewish and secular educational arenas this year. Advocates have put it on the national agenda in the form of the federal Gender Equity in Education package. In Israel the High Court of Justice last fall ordered the Religious Affairs Ministry to eliminate funding discrimination against women's educational establishments. A conference on gender and Jewish day school education last winter in Boston drew several hundred educators and has spawned the publication of *Gender Issues in Jewish Day School Education,* due out this spring. And the National Coalition of Girls' Schools reports a membership of 86, up from 65 in 1992.

The irony is that as questions of gender find a place on the cutting edge of educational theory, and as classes and schools devoted to girls' education are created throughout the United States, in the Orthodox educational world the reverse is true. Here, where schools have been primarily single-sex, educators concerned with girls' education from a traditional perspective have taken the "risky" step of teaching girls and boys in a coeducational setting. So at the same time that non-Orthodox and non-Jewish educators investigate the ways coed classes are failing girls, some traditional Jewish teachers are asserting that it is gender *segregation* that is hurting them.

I began to revisit my own school experiences, when philanthropist Ann Tisch this year spurred the creation of New York City's first public single-sex schools for girls in more

than a decade amidst the protests of boys' rights activists, civil libertarians and some long-time feminists. The Young Women's Leadership School, which opened its doors in East Harlem this year to serve middle-school girls who might otherwise fall through the cracks, was met with a barrage of media attention and a complaint filed with the Department of Education by the New York Civil Liberties Union and the National Organization for Women claiming that the new school violates anti-discrimination laws.

"If our research was gong anywhere, it wasn't toward advocating single-sex schools," asserts April Osajima, a senior associate at the AAUW, which has published numerous reports on girls in public schools that could provide ample evidence for the need for girls-only schools. It's an ironic response, but one that reflects the position of some feminist groups, including NOW, that single-sex schools do not prepare girls for the challenges of the real world.

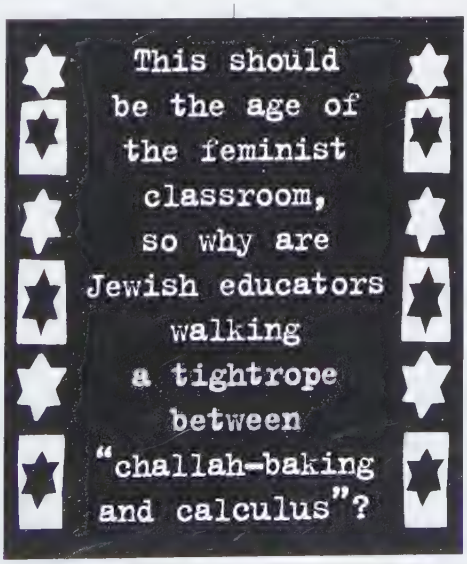
Susan Schlechter, an instructor and doctoral candidate at New York University who has researched issues of gender equity in the classroom, disagrees. The evidence, she says with a touch of humor, shows that "boys should go to co-ed institutions and girls should go to all-girls schools."

This integrationist perspective, which claims that denizens of a coed world will only be well-adjusted by being socialized in a similar coed environment, poses a real challenge to the single-sex advocates. (Witness the severe adjustment difficulties that some young men at The Citadel experienced once women were admitted into their formerly all-male environment.) For Jewish girls in all-girls yeshivot, the question remains whether they will be able to translate the benefits they experience there as they operate in the coed world.

Women may learn to be assertive and articulate in an all-female setting, says Shulamit Elster, an assistant professor of Jewish education and director of programs in Jewish education at Baltimore Hebrew University. But "they don't do that in a mixed setting. . . . [There's] this whole notion that women can't be too wonderful at these things because they might be demeaning to men."

Critics from other camps find fault with the research in the benefits of single-sex schools itself, claiming, among other things, that the data were not collected in a representative environment, and that findings are the result of misguided interpretation. Whitney Ransome, co-executive director of the Association of Girls Schools, a national organization, disagrees. "There's a hue and cry for statistics, numbers showing in a concrete way how girls are shortchanged, how they're not doing better than boys," she says, explaining away such criticisms. "[But] we value the stories of experience. . . . Out of that you have so many heads nodding [in agreement]."

The Young Women's Leadership School in New York City has revived such questions in public debate: Are coeducational schools really short-changing their female students, as Myrna and David Sadker suggested in their 1994 book *Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls?* Do girls in coed schools really suffer from low self-esteem, teacher neglect, math and science phobia? Are they really undervalued in school? And if so, are single-sex schools the best way to address that? Do those schools prepare girls for life in a coeducational world? And do those schools without boys help educators, parents and boys develop a much-needed sensitivity to gender issues?



Perhaps these questions are nowhere more relevant than in the sector of Jewish day schools, where gender and education are intimately entwined. Different educational standards, career expectations and religious mandates for girls and boys have traditionally guided much of Jewish pedagogy.

"Teaching girls at the [high] level that girls are taught at today in yeshivas is a twentieth century development," explains Melissa Klapper, a Ph.D. student at Rutgers University studying vocational Jewish education in America. In the Old World, she says, girls may have received secular education in order to make a living, but Jewish education was essentially considered a male endeavor; girls learned what they needed to know in their mothers' kitchens. It wasn't until Sarah Schenirer started the Bais Yaakov movement in the late 19th century in Eastern Europe that Jewish communities began to consider seriously Jewish education for girls. The balance has tipped back and forth ever since.

Today, however, in an era when women's issues have made inroads into almost every Jewish community—when feminist issues have penetrated the Orthodox community to such an extent that a conference on Orthodoxy and feminism, held in New York in February, could draw 1,000 people—questions of the education of girls can hardly be ignored.

"I think that all the movements within Judaism that have schools are moving in the direction of more and more gender awareness and gender equity, including the Orthodox. Each one is doing it at its own pace," says Shulamit Reinharz, a professor of sociology and head of the Women's Studies program at Brandeis University. "It's extremely significant because Jewish day school attendance is on the rise." In the more liberal branches, schools are essentially all coeducational—progressive for Jewish education as single-sex schools are in the non-Jewish world. Reform and Conservative schools make efforts to pay attention to girls' needs in the classroom and out. Girls in the Conservative movement's Solomon Schechter schools, for instance, are

invited—though not required—to wear a *tallit* at prayer. Coeducation in Jewish schools stems from the integrationist impulse that civil rights activists of 30 years ago fought to achieve in the public schools.

It is in the Orthodox schools, particularly those on the liberal end of the spectrum, however, that the most controversy is brewing. It is here that single-sex education has been the norm. Many Orthodox men expect and are expected to continue studying for years after yeshiva. Most Orthodox women are not. And it is here that educators are being forced to choose: will they embrace coeducation as the only way to ensure equality, or will they cleave to the gender-segregated traditions? Will coeducation take them too far from tradition? Will the single-sex tradition prove too restrictive to be revised?

"Single-sex education can be dangerous because it has been associated with different expectations," explains Devorah Steinmetz, founded of the Beit Rabban school, a coed Orthodox yeshiva in Manhattan. Steinmetz is one who falls clearly into the coed camp. A graduate of a coeducational Jewish day school herself, Steinmetz recalls that in fifth grade the boys began to study Gemara and the girls were asked to take their chairs to the back of the class. She wrote a letter to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the only major Jewish leader she had heard of, asking how any Jew could be denied access to the texts.

By way of recourse, the young Steinmetz found her way in through the notes of some of her male friends, who let her copy their Gemara lessons after school. She was also encouraged, albeit quietly, by her teacher: One day, as she walked by his desk on her way out of class, he said to her, "No one can stop you from listening."

In the traditional world, "separate is not equal," she says. "That's why I'm doing it this way [in my school]. The most important thing we can do is make sure we have the same offerings for boys and girls, and have the same expectations for boys and girls."

But for Orthodox educators who believe in the traditional system, in which boys plan to study for years after yeshiva and girls are expected, once married, to tend to the home, the expectations are an essential reason to have gender-segregated education. As Melissa Klapper, who graduated from a girls yeshiva in Baltimore, explains it, "It's positive to have separate sex schools because the assumption is that the roles will be different [once they grow up]."

Esther Krauss is the principal of Ma'ayanot, an Orthodox girls' school that opened in Teaneck, N.J., this year for 26 ninth grade girls. The community decided to open a girls' school, she says, because "traditionally that is the best model for what we would like to achieve, and that is a well-rounded, deeply committed Jew."

Within that structure, however, Krauss and other educators of Orthodox girls must maintain a delicate balance in their school's focus. With Orthodox women in some communities receiving a very good higher secular education—including advanced degrees—the possibility arises that these women draw away from Orthodoxy because their Jewish lives haven't kept up with their secular opportunities. So on the one hand, Kraus is devoted to running "an all-girls high school that would make all areas of Judaic studies accessible and that would be excellent and enable them to go on to any college career goals that they had." But on the other, she must emphasize the girls distaff duties, "Somewhere along the way, where I come from, clearly there is a priority on the home," she says.

So why gear these girls to college and careers? Why tempt them away from their domestic roles? She laughs. "I've always believed in living dangerously," she says. "I have faith in the tradition that I teach here, and I have faith that the tradition can withstand those challenges."

Perhaps to reinforce their faith in the single-sex system, these traditionalists have incorporated the language of progressive single-sex pedagogy into their speech. "That girls do benefit through separate education I think there is no doubt,"

(continued on page 43)

An Internal Battle Over Civil Rights

The American Jewish Congress, one of the Jewish community's most active organizations on social and constitutional issues, seemed to have met its match recently when it came time to address the question of the public, Tisch-sponsored Young Women's Leadership School in New York, and its vacillations are a window on the complexity of the issue. At the recent meeting of the AJC's Governing Council, the debate was raging.

The issue had been raised to the group of leaders from around the country by the Metropolitan Region of AJC, which was hoping to endorse the school and brought Ann Tisch's husband, Andrew, in tow to advocate on its behalf. "By not allowing this possibility," argued the regional president Howard Teich in favor of the school, "then in fact you're discriminating."

The AJC's Commission on Women's Equality—which in hopes of getting to the bottom of the matter had sponsored a lecture earlier in the season by NYU professor of education Pamela Abder analyzing the research on girls' education—was still split; at the meeting, it's members spoke on both sides of the issue.

The AJC's legal department, citing the paucity of precedents in such matters, had refused to advise on the legality of the school. And the national organization, recognizing the importance of the issue and its implications for school issues around the country, like school choice and the voucher system, declared that it required more time to decide the issue.

In the end, the Met Region of the AJC was alone among the AJC bodies endorsing the school, a decision with no legal implications for the school itself, but one that indicates where at least one progressive Jewish organization may be headed in this controversy over how to teach girls best.

—*S.B.*

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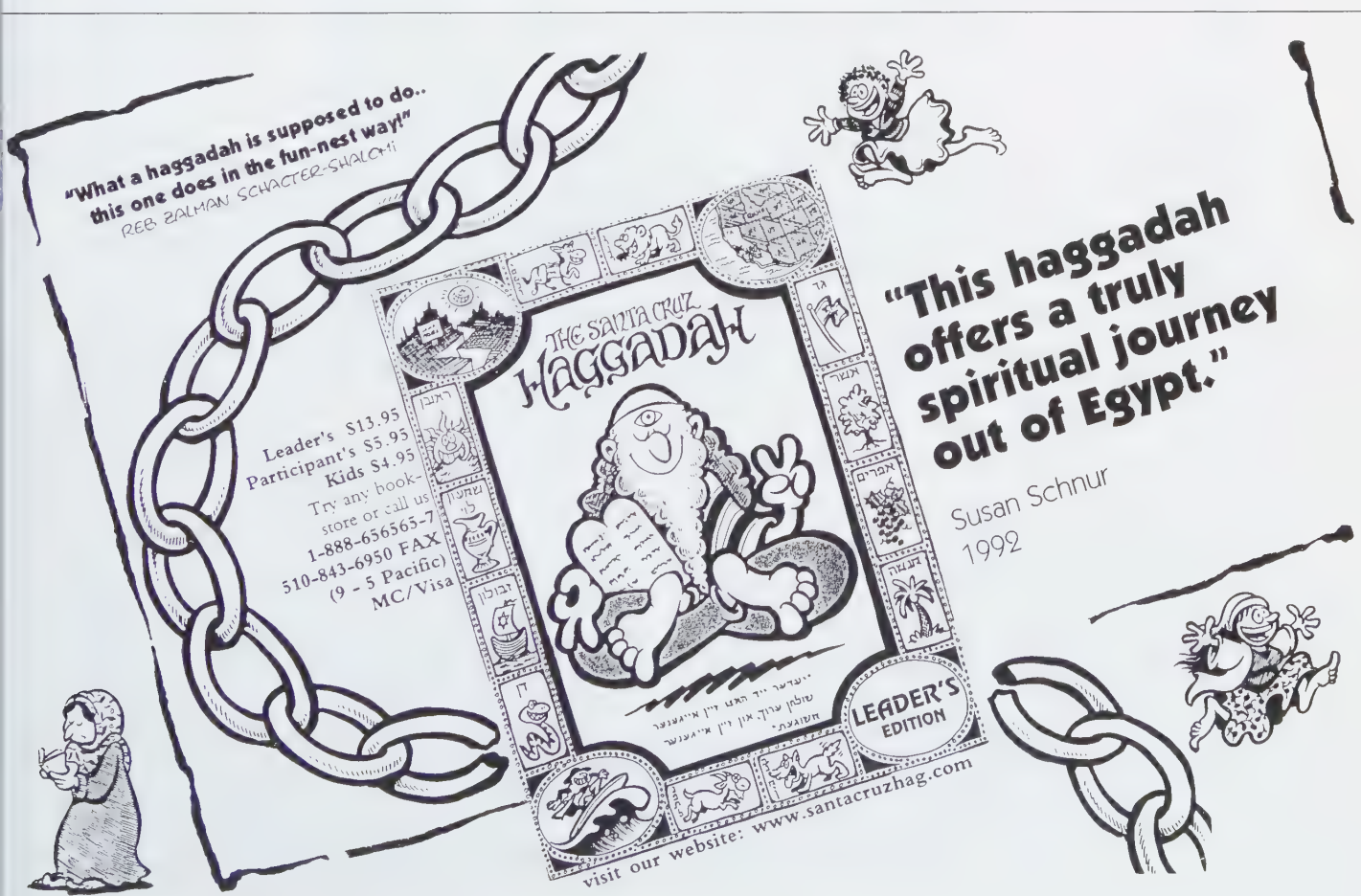


MAGID: The Telling

ADDING GRANDPA'S ORAL HISTORY (AND A FAVORITE SONG!) TO THE PASSOVER SEDER

by Bonnie Theiner

Dorothy Hankin Podolsky and Private Max, 1944

We did something different at our family Passover seders two years ago. For both evenings, during the dinner part of the service, we listened to a veteran of World War II—our own Dad and Grandfather, Max Podolsky—as he told about his experiences as a soldier in the Medical Corps of the U.S. Army.

Passover in 1995 was just prior to the 50th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day, Victory in Japan Day, and the commemoration of the end of World War II. It seemed the right time to officially add my father's story—he was 81 years old—to the authoritative Hagaddah, the telling of Jewish deliverance from Egypt 3,200 years ago.

Though my Dad—like most of our parents and grandparents—often told stories that offered up bits and pieces of his youth, it seemed important to capture his wartime narratives in a permanent and organized manner. I set a tape recorder on the dining room table—beside the ceremonial horseradish, matzah and charoset. To tell the truth, the tape recorder felt, on an emotional level, as sacred as the Cup of Elijah. At the designated time, Dad began his reminiscences.

He was drafted in January 1944. He was a businessman, married, with a baby daughter (me). After only five short months of training at Camp Barkley in Texas with the 52nd Medical Training Battalion, Company C, Dad was sent out to be the only medic (and the only Jew) on a ship that transported troops and supplies and picked up the wounded and prisoners of war. Dad's assignment (he essentially had to learn on the job) was to stop patients from bleeding and to keep patients alive.

As he told of his experiences, the entire family listened more attentively than usual because he was trying to tell the *whole* story—not just fragments—and because we had elevated his *magid* (his "telling") into the context of Jewish ritual and Jewish history. One anecdote of Dad's in particular, I think, bears repeating.

One morning, shortly after the Battle of the Bulge of December 1944, Dad's platoon lieutenant addressed his men in Newport News, Virginia.

"Can anyone here speak German?"

There was no response.

Someone yelled Dad's name, adding, "He knows Yiddish." Dad was called to the "front and center" and asked if he spoke German.

Dad replied that he did not speak German. The lieutenant asked, "Do you speak Yiddish?"

Dad answered, "Yes, sir."

The lieutenant inquired, "Is Yiddish anything like German?"

"Sir, the languages are related."

The lieutenant informed Dad that he had an assignment for him. He was to be at the dock at 0600. A ship with German prisoners-of-war had come into port. An interpreter would be needed for basic conversation and for triage, that is, to determine the priority of medical attention.

Dad stood on the dock as the German prisoners of war disembarked, assessing their ages and their medical conditions. Dad said that the old men—who looked to be in their 50s and 60s, claimed to be 20 to 30 years younger. Among the younger men who claimed to be 17 and older were many who didn't have a hair on their bodies. Some, it turned out, were as young as 13. Dad thought, as he saw these prisoners-of-war, that the war must be soon over: the Germans were using their old men and children.

As Dad, at the seder table, was describing this scene, we all gasped, trying to imagine the circumstances: A Jewish U.S. Army medic, speaking Yiddish, had interpreted on behalf of German prisoners-of-war who had been brought to the U.S. on a U.S. ship! As some of the more arrogant P.O.W.'s came off the ships, the proud Jewish G.I. interpreter made known to these soldiers of the Nazi army that he was Jewish. In unmistakable Yiddish-German, he told them, *"Ich bin a Yid."* ("I am a Jew.")

Dad paused as we family members took in the incredible irony of this situation. On top of all this, he added, he was being protected by a platoon of African-American military police who were shore patrol—the U.S. Armed Services were not desegregated until a presidential act of Harry Truman on July 26, 1948.

At the end of the evening, somewhere between the songs *"Chad Gadya"* and "Who Knows One?," Dad taught us the anthem that he learned from his lieutenant in the Army Medical Corps (though he warned us that the lyrics were rusty—he hadn't sung the song in 50 years):

"To tell the truth, the tape recorder felt as sacred as the Cup of Elijah."

Hail to Medical Men
In the army of the free.
Men who carry on
On land as on the sea.
We're always marching at the side
Of men who fight and sail and fly.
Helping to live
As aid we give to victory,
We're there to do or die.

Dad showed us his pocket-sized Hebrew Bible inscribed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and his dog tag with the identification "H" for Hebrew. (If you have Jewish veterans in your family, ask to see theirs.)

With only a little coaxing, my mother, Dorothy Hankin Podolsky, added humbly that during the war she "did nothing special, only kept the home fires burning" and cared for a baby on a serviceman's pay and war ration coupons!

After the seder, we placed my parents' audio tape on the shelf next to our Passover *haggadot,* the prayer books that describe the Exodus of Israelites from slavery three millennia ago. The tape is now a permanent source of history, a contemporary "telling," a piece added to Jewish history by elders in our own family, a supplement—thousands of years later—to the Passover story of the eternal search for justice and freedom.

And at this year's seder, and I hope all those to come, somewhere between *"Adir Hu"* and the stick that beat the dog that bit the cat, we'll be stoutheartedly adding our family's own received Passover anthem, "Hail to Medical Men." ■

Bonnie P. Theiner is a teacher of Hebrew/Judaica, bar/bat mitzvah, and secular studies and a freelance writer. She has two young-adult sons and lives in Pittsburgh, as do her parents.

HALLO OUT THERE!!! GOT AN ARMY YARN?

For a book-in-progress, Theiner is collecting the narratives of World War II Jewish GI's, male and female, and/or civilian men and women in the same period. She'd love to see your story. (All due credits will be given to contributors.) Subsequent to her project, she will send all information to the National Museum of American Jewish Military History in Washington, DC.

On another matter... Bonnie's Dad would love to know if he has gotten the lyrics to the Army Medical Corps Anthem semi-right. Is there anybody out there with a better half-century memory? Send material to: Bonnie P. Theiner, 5916 Beacon Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15217; (412) 421-8915.

Also . . .

For a social history of the military experience of American Jews during World War II to be published by Harvard University Press, send letters, memoirs, photos and other material relating to the war to: Deborah Dash Moore, Department of Religion, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N.Y. 12604; (914) 437-5521.

GUNTER TEMECH

SEPARATED AT BIRTH

By Andrea Adam Brott

Fall 1985

Inside the same steel pyramid,
at five of nine,
you and I check ourselves
in spotless mirrored walls,
train our mothers' cool eyes
on our own reflections.
The elevator
cages we've been riding
since birth
spit us politely onto matching
Persian carpets,
delivering us
to our first day of work.

Behind doors that shut
with well-bred clicks,
behind yawning
desks overlooking the Bay,
you and I are new coins
polished bright by ideals,
two wary hearts in pinstriped suits.
Two firstborns—one Jewish, one
black—
twin daughters of Moses
growing up in Pharaoh's palace.

Summer 1986

Like Allied spies in old movies,
we dare a raised eyebrow,
the ghost of a smile, a public
private wink.
We are four parts discretion,
one part subversion;
to find each other,
we must give ourselves away.
We exchange
well-loved books—I fall for Zora
and Teacake.
In your desk, my books huddle
with your boombox and your Bible.

Over yogurts and pretzels that pass
for lunch, you and I wince at jokes
about Oreos and JAPs,
at their well-meant advice to postpone
having kids.
We share the ugly compliments
they want us to want:
"The good kind of Jew," and
"Doesn't act too black."

Working late, you bring tea
to my office,
unwind.
Sometimes, you've been crying;
we pretend I can't tell.
I audition for the part of your
prodigal sister,
imagine you laughing,
calling me girl.
You and I are
cautious magnets,
inching toward each other;
color dozes
like a snake between us.

Winter 1987

You ask me where to buy
Lady Baltimore cake.
We laugh when matching visions
pop up like bunny ears:
Our mothers—our age—
hair freshly "done,"
legs shaved and gleaming
in crisp Bermuda shorts,
rustling to the kitchen
with those lipstick-pink boxes,

while you and I pretend
we don't see a thing.

From inside, the bass-line
beats its fists on your door;
I ring 3 times
before someone lets me in.
20 pairs of eyes
flicker up at me; their gazes fall
and blink,
like rows of question marks.
In the back of the room—
one white face;
I am learning how to count
but not how to stop.

I cut myself
some cake, wolf it down standing,
finally realize
why other people smoke.

You glide from the kitchen,
make introductions,
speak my name, another name,
my name
like a kiss.

On the drive home to Berkeley,
fog staggers through the streets;
I slow, replay your voice,
find apology there.
The right fork, the right tone—
our mothers drilled us well.
Use this
if you betray someone
but aren't sure whom.

Fall 1988

Behind my knocks, your
tummy-laughing—
you hang up when I come in,
like a measuring tape
snapping back into place.
Looking down from your wall,
as if surprised to see us,
is a man realizing
that the stubby white cop
has decided to sic
his dog on the crowd.
Someone captured them
on the road to Birmingham;
you and I were busy then,
sounding out, "See Spot run."

An eight o'clock concert:
I wait outside in the drizzle—
at nine, I sell your ticket,
to save you
thirty bucks.

You show up at nine-thirty (I learn
the next day);
what went to bed a favor
woke up paternal.
I suggest, Make drugs legal,
cut crime in half;
you hear me stacking
young black bodies.
Misunderstandings
bloom and fade like chicken pox;
like the ten plagues in Egypt,
it is all foretold.

Spring 1989

At the Passover seder,
I chant Avadim hayinu;
Sunday mornings you sing
your own redemption songs.
I don't want to be chosen
to be the sacrifice
the god of perfect black-ness
demands from his faithful.
I can't go gently
like Isaac
or Jesus.
I curse you for not
fighting harder for me.

Spring 1990

My daughter's birth breathes
very softly on our embers;
you appear on my doorstep, burdened
with gifts.
You hold her in your arms,
I hold you in my gaze;
for one clear moment
we share the same heart.

Fall 1991

On what's becoming
our last night,
while our husbands pay the check,
and you and I stare
at the tea leaves in our cups,
I remember the woman in
Solomon's story
whose child the wily king
threatened to split.
She said, "Let him live,
though it be apart from me,"
her unselfishness proving
they belonged together.

We walk in silence
to the empty parking lot;
the air smells like gasoline,
jasmine, dirt.
Then with one goodnight kiss,
I relinquish our twinship,
hoping thereby
to have it restored.

If not, I'll freeze this picture
in my heart's rear-view
mirror: Separate cars,
always bound
in opposite directions—
carrying us both
toward the same milk and honey,
the same
unborn place
that lies beyond counting.

Summer 1978

In the after-dinner cool,
your father helps you pack the car
for tomorrow's drive
down to Washington, and Howard.
But a faraway sun
has melted your heart,
turned it to ink
inside your fertile pen.
So while the two of you linger,
rearranging duffel bags,
you start shaping what you'll write
about the women of Soweto,
in whose distant cries
you have found
your own voice.

For me, it's five a.m.,
and morning crouches, panting,
ready to pounce
from behind the glowing hills.
I stoop in the dust
of the Upper Galilee
uproot small boulders, heave them
on a truck.
Years from now, while I'm sitting
in my dorm-room in Cambridge,
my small corner will be plowed
without a blade's breaking.
But today, with slow steps,
I plant this field
in my head, store away
for leaner years
secret oceans of carrots. ■

Andrea Adam Brott's work has appeared recently or is forthcoming in The Quarterly, New York Quarterly, Cimarron Review, Dominion Review, Calyx, The Cape Rock, *and* Rain City Review, *and was one of the winners of the Anna Davidson Rosenberg Poetry Awards for poems on the Jewish experience. She also practices civil rights law in Berkeley, California. This poem is dedicated to C.L.P.*

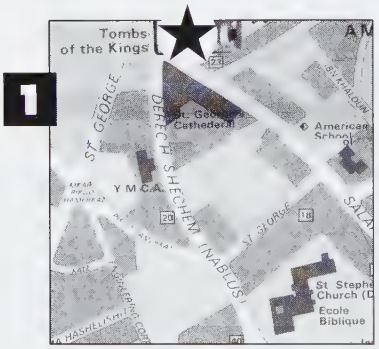
LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS WOMEN

A WALKING (OR ARMCHAIR) TOUR HONORING JERUSALEM'S RENOWNED TERRIFIC WOMEN

BY DOROTHY GITTER HARMAN AND NITZA BROWN ROSOVSKY

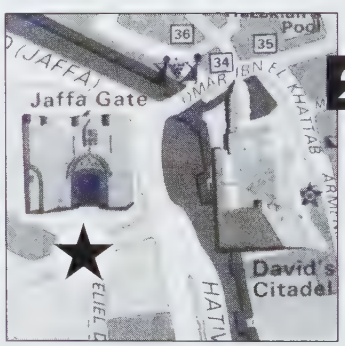
As one wanders through the streets and alleys of Jerusalem—whether on foot, by car, or as an "arm-chair" traveler—one comes across many places identified with the lives of Jewish "daughters of Jerusalem," as the Song of Songs refers to us.

HELENA OF ADIABENE

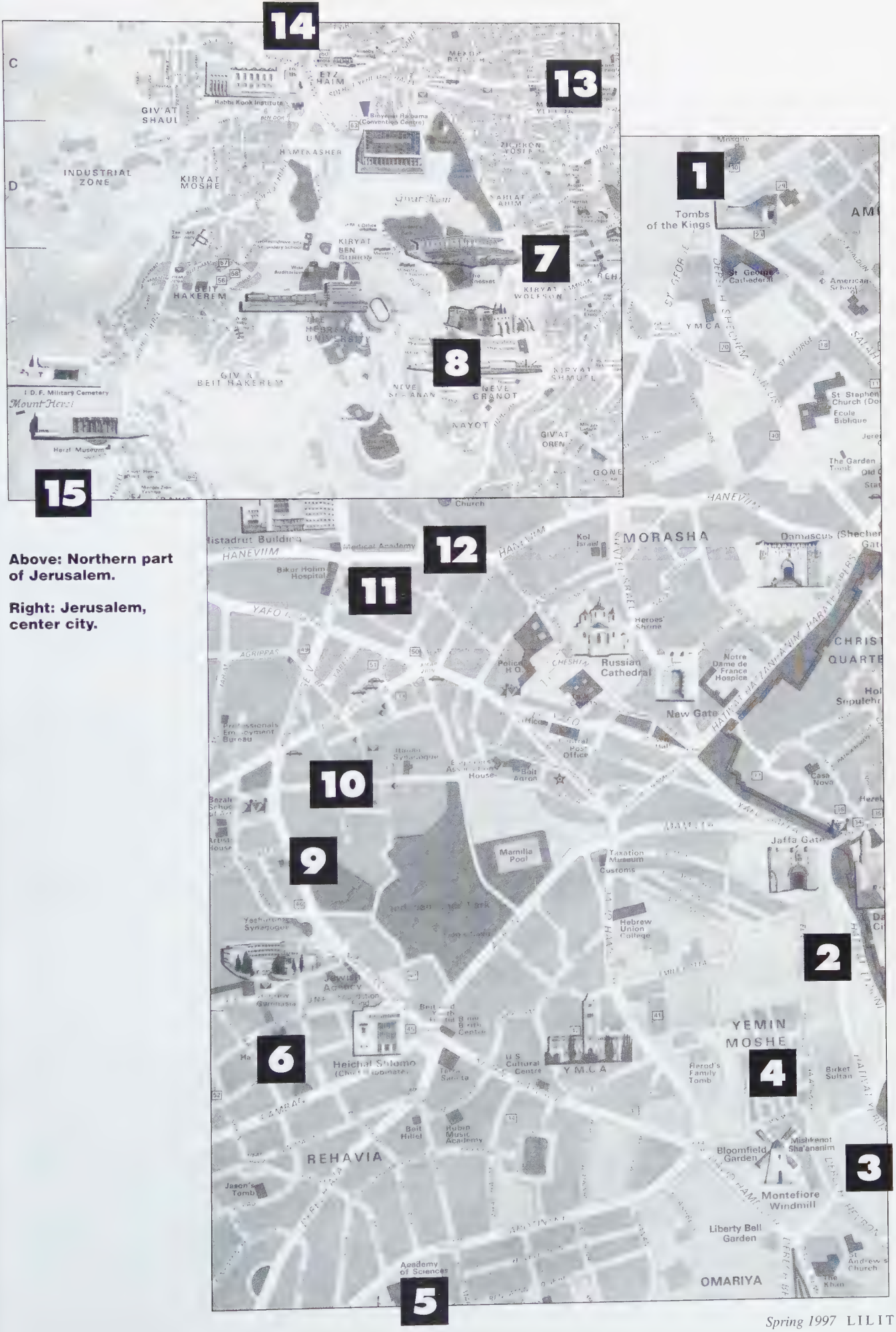


Since recorded history has not been kind to women, it is not surprising that the first place in Jerusalem known to be associated with a unique woman—in fact a queen—is called the Tombs of the Kings! **[#1 on map]** In 1863, Frenchman Louis-Felicien de Saulcy, the first person to conduct an archaeological excavation in Jerusalem, thought he had discovered the tombs of the Judean kings. Located north of of the Old City, where **Shchem (Nablus) Road and Salah-a-Din Street** meet, one can visit the courtyard of the tombs, descend 23 steps, see the remains of two Doric pillars and a frieze decorated with a bunch of grapes and acanthus leaves. The extensive rock-hewn underground burial chambers could be sealed off securely by rolling a huge stone in a furrow across the entrance (the stone is still there). Other tombs from that era have similar "rolling stones." Interned here was a Palmyran queen, **Helena of Adiabene** (from northern Mesopotamia), who had converted to Judaism around the year 46 and came to live in Jerusalem. When de Saulcy secretly whisked part of her sarcophagus to the Louvre—thinking it belonged to the wife of King Zedekiah (hence the mistaken name-Tombs of the Kings), he caused an uproar in Jerusalem. Since then, archaeologists have been seen by some right-wing Israelis as grave desecraters.

KRESHE BERMAN



Just below Jaffa Gate, west of the Old City, is **Hutzot Hayotzer**, a 19th-century shopping arcade. At the bottom of the steps, where Mitchell Garden begins, is an old grinding stone **[#2 on map]** from an 1886 flour mill which stood nearby, owned by **Kreshe Berman** and her sons, Yehoshua and Eliahu. Kreshe arrived in Jerusalem from Lithuania ten years earlier with her husband and their four children and settled near the Hurva Synagogue (in the Old City), where her husband spent his days studying and praying, thus assuring the family's future in the next world. The minor matter of feeding the children in this world was left to his wife, who started to bake and sell cakes. When Russian Christian pilgrims began to ask for black bread, then unavailable in the city, Kreshe figured out how to mix the fruit of the carob tree with the local flour to produce dark bread. Soon she established the first commercial bakery in the country. Kreshe died in 1933, at age 105, leaving behind some twenty grandchildren and many great-grandchildren. The Berman Bakery, now located at 26 Beit Hadfuss at Givat Shaul (an industrial area in the western part of the city), is still operated by her great-grandson Yitzhak Berman and two of his five daughters, Noa and Teda.



Above: Northern part of Jerusalem.

Right: Jerusalem, center city.

LIA VAN LEER

From Kreshe Berman's grinding stone, walk through Mitchell Garden and past the Sultan's Pool—a water reservoir which used to cover the area named for Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent who repaired it in the 16th century—to **Derech Hebron** and the **Cinematheque [#3 on map]**, founded by **Lia Van Leer** and her late husband, Wim, in 1981. *(Le Monde* has called it *"la plus belle cinematheque do monde.")* The Cinematheque houses Israel's finest film archive and the most important collection of Israeli and Yiddish films and films on Jewish themes. Lia, who directs the archive and the Cinematheque, also established the highly acclaimed Jerusalem International Film Festival which is held here annually, and she serves on the juries of the Cannes and Berlin Film Festivals as well. Lia successfully fought to keep the Cinematheque, which is a major cultural and educational institution, open on the Sabbath, helping to keep youth from traveling to Tel Aviv for weekend entertainment. The Cinematheque occupies a series of beautifully renovated buildings (note the red roofs and stone-framed windows) which were part of a settlement built here in 1900 by some impoverished Jews, and abandoned after the massacre at Hebron in 1929. There is a pleasant restaurant at the Cinematheque and on sunny days one can sit at the terrace and gaze at the southwestern corner of the Old City wall and at Mount Zion, across the Valley of Hinnom—the site where children, during biblical times, were sacrificed to the god called Molech.

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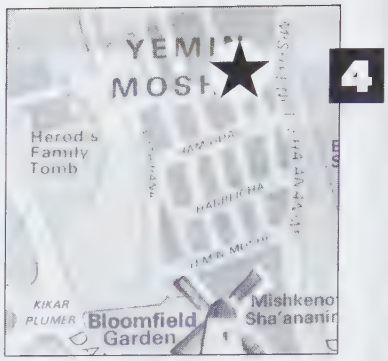
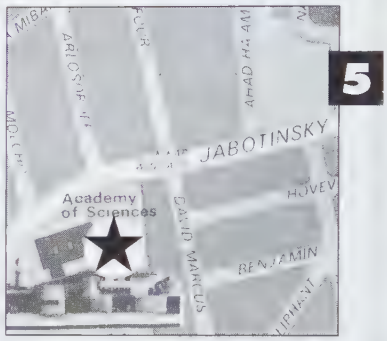
Lia Van Leer

Lia Van Leer's home **[#4 on map]** is located in Yemin Moshe, nearby to the Cinematheque, across the B'nai Brith Bridge and past Mishkenot Sha'ananim. Built in 1892 and named after Sir Moses Montefiore, Yemin Moshe was practically deserted between 1948 and 1967, when it bordered on no-man's-land. Since the Six-Day War, however, nearly all the houses have been lavishly renovated, including the Van Leers' house, which was remodelled by architect Moshe Safdie. It stands at the end of Pele Yoez Street, next to the water fountain



POLLY VAN LEER



Polly Van Leer, Lia's mother-in-law, was one of the colorful figures in the city during the 1950s and 1960s. Of Dutch origin, married to Bernard, who headed the Van Leer Industries (an international packaging company), Polly settled in Jerusalem after World War II and started a well-known salon of philosophers, scientists, and artists from around the world. Polly created and published the *Chronicles,* Bible stories written in contemporary newspaper form, a popular bar/bar mitzvah gift to this day. She passionately believed in Isaiah's prophecy—that "from Jerusalem shall go forth the teaching"—and she set about to build nothing less than "The Center for Advancement of Human Culture." Polly established and built the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, which shares a campus with the Israel Academy of Science and Humanities in a complex at **43 Jabotinsky Street [#5 on map]**, next to the president's official residence. The elegant neighborhood is known as Talbieh, and it contains many spacious 1920s houses, typical of affluent Christian-Arab construction during the British Mandate.

RACHEL YANAIT BEN-ZVI

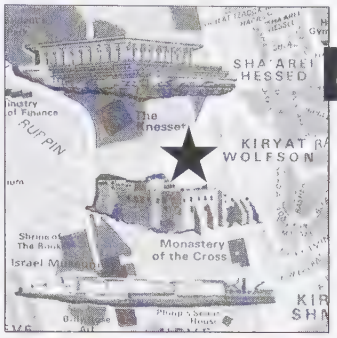
Talbieh abuts Rehavia, where, closer to the center of town, Yad Ben-Zvi **[#6 on map]** is located at 17 Alharizi Street, off Ibn Gavirol. Now a memorial to Israel's second president, Izhak Ben-Zvi, it was his wife who turned the house into Jerusalem's first official presidential

residence. A remarkable woman, who arrived in the city from her native Ukraine in 1908, **Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi** helped shape modern Jerusalem. Among the schools she helped found were the Hebrew Gymnasium, still one of the city's finest high schools and currently located a couple of blocks away from Yad Ben-Zvi, and later the agricultural high school for girls in Talpiot, opposite the Haas Promenade with its fabulous panoramic views of Jerusalem from the south. Known affectionately by oldtimers as "Rachel Yanait's farm," the girls' high school now serves as an experimental agricultural station of the Hebrew University. Between 1948 and 1967, when the school was in no-man's-land, Rachel established the Ein Karem agricultural Youth Village on the western boundary of the city. Rachel also played a pioneering role in the Women's Labor Movement and in Ahdut Ha'avodah party in Palestine and she was a leader of the Haganah, the pre-1948 Jewish militia, as well. When Izhak Ben-Zvi was inaugurated in 1953, two Swedish prefabricated huts were added to the original 1920s house at 17 Alharizi to serve as reception areas. The huts soon became a meeting place for all segments of Israel's new and diverse society. Yad Ben-Zvi is open to the public and visitors are welcomed.

ZELDA SHNEERSON MISHKOVSKY

A slight detour brings one to **9 Hakalir Street [#7 on map]**, in the tranquil Orthodox Sha'arei Hessed quarter, where the poet **Zelda Shneerson Mishkovsky** lived toward the end of her life. Born in Yekaterinberg, Russia, Zelda came to Jerusalem in 1928 with her family, the Shneersons, of a distinguished rabbinical line. She received her education at the Orthodox Spitzer School for Girls—a beautiful building still standing in the Bukharan Quarter—where she found the regime severe and uninteresting. She later studied at the Mizrachi Teachers' Seminar, where she was exposed to some of Jerusalem's best minds and where she grew intellectually, socially, and culturally. Upon graduation, Zelda taught, wrote poetry and drew. Happily married, she published her first volume of poetry upon her husband's death. It brought her instant acclaim as a sensitive, lyrical poet, and she continued to publish five further volumes, bringing to her readers what T. Carmi has characterized as "a unique blend of deep religious feeling, drawing on Hasidic lore, with a modern poetic sensibility." Her apartment became a salon for Jerusalem's literati and other cultural figures.

AYALA SACHS ABRAMOV



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Ayala Sachs Abramov

Next to Sha'arei Hessed stand several tall apartment houses, **Kiryat Wolfson [#8 on map]**, which overlook the Knesset and the Israel Museum. There lives **Ayala Sachs Abramov,** née Ben-Tovim, a distinguished art connoisseur and philanthropist, especially noted for her support of contemporary Israeli art; a pavilion dedicated to this genre at the Israel Museum is named for her. Ayala and her husband donated the library at Hebrew Union College—designed by Moshe Safdie—at 13 King David Street, a great place to browse and read. The old Ben-Tovim house is located at 138 Jaffa Road, guarded by two stone lions. Originally a Turkish guard house, it was turned into a residence for a British consul who lived there until 1890. Today it serves as the Mahane Yehuda Police Station. Ayala's great-grandmother was Kreshe Berman!

ELSA LASKER SCHULER

LEO BAECK INSTITUTE, INC

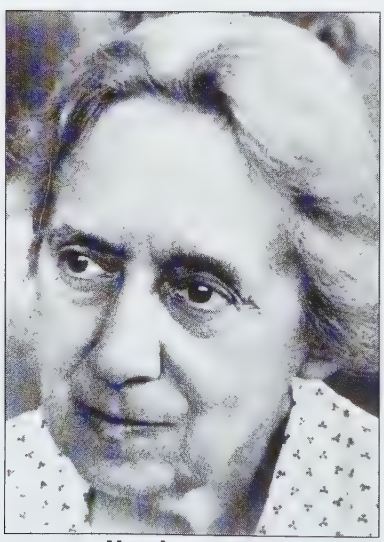
Elsa Lasker Schuler

Going back toward the center of the city, at **2 Rehov Ha'maalot [#9 on map]**, on the corner of King George Street, lived the poet **Elsa Lasker Schuler** in an unheated, sparsely furnished room. She was born in Berlin in 1869, and was already well established and considered by some to be the greatest lyric poet in the German language of the time when she immigrated to Palestine in 1939, escaping Nazism. A true Bohemian, she was considered by Jerusalemites to be rather eccentric; one of her favorite haunts was the Zichel Cafe on 6 Ben Yehuda Street—now

gone—which was a well-known meeting spot in pre-Independence days. Lasker Schuler's first volume of poetry was published in 1902, her last in 1943, two years before her death; her most famous work is *Hebrew Ballads*. S. Y. Agnon recited the Kaddish at her funeral on the Mount of Olives. It is said that when giving her street address, Lasker Schuler always added "opposite Beit Ha'maalot," the first modern apartment house in Jerusalem built in the 1930s in the International style. Lasker Schuler herself lived in a hovel, but her residence faced Beit Ha'maalot, which was very elegant (and still exists).

HENRIETTA SZOLD

Just two blocks away, at **26 Ha'histadrut Street**, corner of Hillel, is another 1930s International-style building, decorated with an arched arcade—a local "oriental" motif. Now an office building, this was the former **Eden Hotel [#10 on map]**, a popular gathering place for Israeli politicians when the Knesset used to be located nearby at 26 King George Street. The Eden was also the place where **Henrietta Szold** lived while in Jerusalem—a woman whose lifetime accomplishments in health, education, welfare, teaching, and publishing are legendary. Born in Baltimore, she first visited Palestine with her mother in 1909, and while enchanted with the beauty of the country, she was also shocked by the squalor of its inhabitants. As a founder of Hadassah, and with the American Zionist Organization, where she was a key figure, she was instrumental in establishing Jerusalem's Hadassah Hospital, and she headed its Nurses Training School. (Hadassah Hospital was first located at 37 Rehov Ha'nevi'im, near the Ticho House.) In 1934 Henrietta Szold laid the cornerstone for the Mount Scopus Hadassah Hospital, designed by the renowned German Jewish architect, Erich Mendelsohn. In the same year she founded Youth Aliya, a remarkable organization that brought Jewish youngsters, mostly orphans, from war-ravaged Europe to a new life in Palestine.



COURTESTOF HADASSAH THE WOMEN'S ZIONIST ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA, INC.

Henrietta Szold

MYRIAM HARRY

An oasis on **Harav Kook Street**, just off bustling Zion Square, is **Ticho House [#11 on map]** with its small museum, surrounded by a spacious garden and featuring a pleasant cafe. One of the first residences outside the Old City, built in the 1860s by Aga Rashid of the Nasheshibi family, the house is an architectural gem, typical of Arab residential construction, with thick walls, domed rooms and pointed arches. The lives of two interesting women are associated with the house. One was **Myriam Harry,** author of *La Petite Fille de Jerusalem*, a charming book about growing up in this house in the 1880s. She was the daughter of Moses Shapira, a converted Russian Jew who married a German Lutheran deaconess, and in her memoir Myriam describes the various creatures that roamed the flower-filled garden, including a deer and an ostrich. An antique dealer of dubious fame, Shapira supplied the British Museum with the "oldest written text in the world." When it was exposed as a fake, the disgraced Shapira committed suicide and his family soon left Jerusalem for Europe. Myriam died in Paris in 1958, at age 83.

ANNA TICHO

In 1924, Moravian-born Abraham and **Anna Ticho,** who had arrived in Jerusalem in 1912, moved into the Shapira house. Abraham was an eminent opthamologist who worked hard to combat trachoma, a disease then rampant in the Middle East which, left untreated, causes blindness. He counted kings Faisel and Abdullah among his pre-1948 patients. His hospital occupied the first floor, while upstairs Anna created her enchanting black-and-white charcoal and pencil drawings of Jerusalem and the Judean hills. When she died in 1980, at age 86, she bequeathed the house to the people of Jerusalem. Anna's paintings, along with her husband's books, photographs and historic documents, are now on display at the intimate house-museum.

NIR BAREKET, THE ISRAEL MUSEUM

Flowers by Anna Ticho

DR. HELENA KAGAN

The old Hadassah Hospital (mentioned above) was located a few houses up the street, on the corner of Harav Kook and Ha'nevi'im. A block away is **64 Rehov Ha'nevi'im** (Street of the Prophets) **[#12 on map]**, a compound with a charming garden where two other noteworthy women lived. The two-storied house on the far left was built in the 1870s by the British Pre-Raphaelite painter, William Holman Hunt, during his third stay in the city. He left it to his Russian housekeeper, and the Russian Orthodox cross (from her time) can still be seen over the entrance. Turkish soldiers were billeted there during World War I, and soon thereafter, **Dr. Helena Kagan** moved in. The Tashkent-born, Swiss-educated physician—a descendent of the Gaon of Vilna—was a pioneer in pediatric medicine who cared for children of all religions, especially poor and homeless children. Among the honors bestowed on her was the Israel Prize, the country's highest civic award. She lived in the house for over fifty years, until she died in 1978, at age 89.

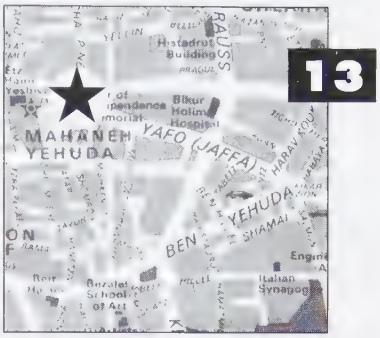
RAHEL

In the small house on the right of the courtyard, the poet **Rahel** lived in 1925. An early *halutza*—pioneer—the beautiful Rahel Bluwstien arrived from Russia in 1909, and later settled in Degania and tilled fields on the shores of the Kinneret. She suffered from tuberculosis, however, and was forced to move to Jerusalem with its drier climate. In this house Rahel wrote of the pear tree that blossomed outside her window, diverting her from mourning her own life. How could she think of her own withering blossom when spring presented her with such a glorious bouquet? She composed passionate poems, some to an unknown lover. Her poetry, much of which has been put to song, has endured as an indelible part of Israeli folklore. She eventually moved to Safed and then to Tel Aviv where she lived in abject poverty. In 1931 the 41-year-old Rahel died of consumption.

FROM *HEBREW WRITERS, A GENERAL DIRECTORY*

Rahel

SCHWESTER SELMA



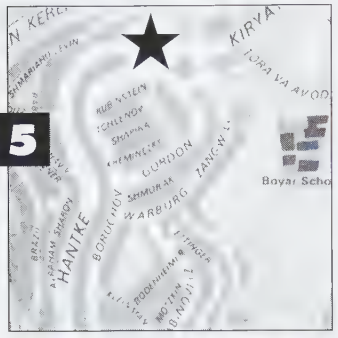
Continuing west at the end of Ha'nevi'im, one reaches **161 Jaffa Road [#13 on map]**, the original Sha'arei Zedek Hospital, where another remarkable woman who played a central role in the development of health services in Jerusalem lived and spent most of her time. The diminutive **Schwester Selma** [Nurse Selma]—no one seems to remember her last name—was one of the first two Jews to be certified in nursing in Germany, where she was happily employed in Hamburg's Salomon Heine Hospital until Dr. Moshe Wallach convinced her to join him in Palestine as head nurse in "his" Sha'arei Zedek Hospital. She arrived in 1916, during World War I, to find an institution with only one physician and one qualified nurse, no running water or electricity and no transportation other than donkeys. She soon whipped the place into shape, establishing standards of practice and patient care which have come to define hospital nursing in Israel. The School of Nursing that she founded at Sha'arei Zedek in 1934 is still one of the foremost in the country. Schwester Selma lived on the hospital premises until her death in her late 80s. The hospital moved to new premises in Ba'it Va'gan in 1980, and there are now plans to renovate the old site. Completed in 1902 with the financial help of German Jews, the original building was designed by architect Theodore Sandler, a German Templar. It was considered one of the most elegant buildings in the city.

PROFESSOR NEHAMA LEIBOWITZ

Not far from here, in a small and spartan apartment located on **Hatzvi Street [#14 on map]**, in Romema, lives the doyenne of Bible teachers—some say of all time—93-year-old **Professor Nehama Leibowitz,** who still holds classes here. The sister of maverick philosopher-scientist, Yeshaya Leibowitz, she was born in Riga and received her doctorate from the University of Berlin prior to immigrating to Jerusalem in 1930. She began teaching 70 years ago, originally by stencilling sheets with questions about the weekly Bible portions—the famous *Gilyonot*—which she wrote, duplicated, and distributed internationally. These have

since been collated and published, as have her lectures and comments on the Five Books of Moses. Professor Leibowitz has brought up generations of Bible students from all over the world, engaging them through her unique method of teaching. An Israel Prize recipient, Nehama Leibowitz has become a legend in her own time.

ZENA HARMAN



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Zena Harman

Our tour ends at the city's southwestern corner, on **Shmaryahu Levin Street [#15 on map]**, where **Zena Harman** has been living for the past 25 years. As a young, new immigrant from London, she worked as one of Henrietta Szold's last assistants. Influenced, no doubt, by her experiences with Henrietta Szold, Zena Harman went on to have a distinguished career that focused mainly on the welfare of children. Israel's representative on the U.N. Human Rights Commission and many U.N. General Assemblies, longtime Chair of UNICEF who accepted the Nobel Peace Prize on its behalf, still later elected a Member of the Knesset on the Labor Party ticket, she now—in her 80s—serves as the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Correspondent for Israel. She also conceived, founded and was the first Chair of the Jerusalem Council for children. Zena Harman's daughter, Naomi Hazan, now serves as a Meretz Knesset member. Shmaryahu Levin is a quiet street on the slopes of a hill not far from the new Hadassah Medical Center, overlooking Mount Herzl and the majestic Jerusalem forest. ■

Both authors are themselves connected to many of the notables on this stroll. Dorothy Gitter Harman is director of the Van Leer Forum at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute (as well as being the editorial consultant in Israel for Harvard University Press); she is the daughter-in-law of Zena Harman. Nitza Brown Rosovsky's great-grandmother was Kreshe Berman, and Ayala Sachs Abramov is a cousin; Helena Kagan was her mother's perdiatrician, and Dr. Ticho operated on her grandfather. Rosovsky says she remembers visiting the Ticho house on this occasion, in the 1940s. Rosovsky is the author of Jerusalem Walks *(Holt) and editor of* City of the Great King: Jerusalem from David to the Present *(Harvard University Press, 1996).*

TO END ONE'S TOUR

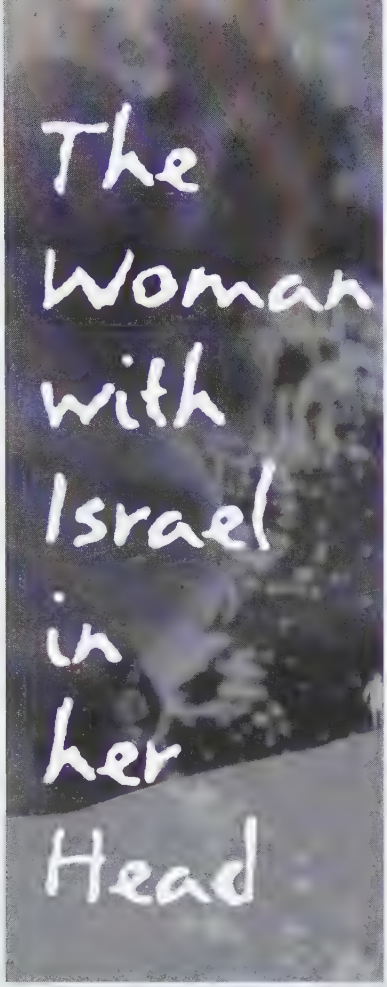
LILITH's editors suggest, in honor of these 16 reclaimed "daughters of Jerusalem," a recitation of Proverbs 31, to be declaimed on Shmaryahu Levin Street, looking out over the Jerusalem hills:

A Woman of Valor, who can find?
For her price is far above rubies.
The hearts of her spiritual daughters
do safely trust in her,
And we have no lack of gain.

She fears the Lord and laughs at the time to come—
Helena of Adiabene;
And eats not the bread of idleness, but rises while it is yet night to feed households—
Kreshe Berman.
She treasures the past of her people and safeguards it—
Lia Van Leer;
And sits among the elders of the land, her lamp going not out by night—
Polly Van Leer.
She fights and imagines and creates a sacred future—
Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi;
And the law of kindness is on her tongue—
Zelda Shneerson Mishovsky.
She stretches out her discerning hand to the needy—
Ayala Sachs Abramov;
And follows her soul, in life as in her word—
Elsa Lasker Schuler.
Like the merchant-ships, she brings provisions from afar—
Henrietta Szold;
And she considers a field, and writes of it—
Myriam Harry.
She works willingly with her hands, delivering her paintings unto the people—
Anna Ticho;
And the children rise up and call her blessed—
Dr. Helena Kagan.
She opens her mouth with wisdom—
Rahel;
And does good and not evil all the days of her life—
Shwester Selma.
She is known in the gates, strength and dignity her clothing—
Nehama Leibowitz.
She looks well to the ways of all nations—
Zena Harman.

Many women have done valiantly,
But you—daughters of Jerusalem—surpass them all.
Grace is deceitful, and beauty vain;
But you who have loved and served Jerusalem,
You shall be praised.
Let us—your daughters—give you the fruit of your hands,
And restore your names to the gates. AMEN.

—adapted by Rabbi Susan Schnur



The Woman with Israel in her Head

The woman in her bed
with street corners
with the smell of Za'atar
on sesame Arab bread
the woman in the salt
the sea weed air permeating
her hair
her feet in the hot sand
shifting so fast
she wakes up her lover
she is in bed
with the juice from a cyprus tree
between her fingers
the green bitterness on her tongue
she is on a sidewalk
in the market place
buying dried apricots and dates
her legs draw love from the sidewalk
and she doesn't even care
that on the way home is lined
with ugly concrete buildings
she doesn't remember only the beautiful things,
same as smiling at the klutzy and stupid things
a cherished lover did.
She is in bed with a country
with vast graveyards,
sun burned fields,
old women in bus stations,
Russian scientists driving taxis,
the Hebrew language spoken on the street,
a theatre floor covered with shells of sunflower seeds,
her mother's red, hot, Lybian fish,
so hot she chokes on her tears
so her lover wraps his arms around her
as far as he can wrap around a woman
and her country
in bed.

—Netta Blatt

Netta Blatt is an Israeli poet who has lived in New York for 18 years. She is now moving back to Israel.

For the past twenty years or so, Jewish women have been entering into the stories of women in the Bible through the long-practiced art of midrash, reliving and imaginatively expanding upon the core tales of our tradition. Here, a Muslim feminist writer and scholar does likewise, retelling the story of Hagar, often known to Jews only as the shadowy half of the Sarah/Hagar dyad.

MY MUSLIM ANCESTOR HAGAR

BY AZIZAH Y. AL-HIBRI

PHOTO BY GAIL RUBIN

Everyone knows Hagar was Sarah's maid who was made available to Abraham and then sent away with her son into the wilderness. . . a very modern story of class exploitation, sexual abuse, and the oppression of a vulnerable woman by her male-identified female boss. This, however, is a secular reductionist view of Hagar's story. The story of Hagar is best told through her eyes. I am going to retell it here, looking back to what I consider part of my own history.

Hagar is my ancestral grandmother. In a family whose family tree goes back more than a thousand years, I know the name of every male ancestor I ever had, and often something about his life story. I do not know the names of my female ancestors, other than my immediate grandmothers, Fihmiyah and Azizah (my maternal grandmother who gave me her name), and a handful of historically outstanding women, such as Khadijah, Fatimah and Sukainah. For this reason, Hagar is very important to me. She is the mother of my whole family, the mother of my mostly unknown mothers.

IN A FAMILY WHOSE FAMILY TREE GOES BACK MORE THAN A THOUSAND YEARS, I KNOW THE NAME OF EVERY MALE ANCESTOR. I DO NOT KNOW THE NAMES OF MY FEMALE ANCESTORS, OTHER THAN MY IMMEDIATE GRANDMOTHERS. FOR THIS REASON, HAGAR IS VERY IMPORTANT TO ME.

The Qur'an does not mention Hagar, but commentaries by famous Muslim historians, such as al-Tabari (9th century) and Ibn Kathir (14th century) tell us that she became the wife of Abraham and gave him his first son, Ishmael, the very son, according to these historians, that Abraham almost sacrificed in order to prove his acceptance of God's will. (How could that son be Isaac, Muslim historians ask, if God demanded from Abraham that he sacrifice his *only* son?)

I left Lebanon for the United

"THE OPINION OF HAGAR"

BY ALICIA SUSKIN OSTRIKER

And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the
Egyptian, which she had born unto
Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said
unto Abraham, Cast out this
bondwoman and
her son: for the son of this bondwoman
shall not be
heir with my son, even Isaac.

—[Genesis 21:9-10]

I have no opinion

I am an Egyptian woman

They sold me and made me her slave

Like everyone else I was in love

With her beauty

She pretended to care for me

Forget about our nationalities, forget

About social rank, she would say

We are women together

That is what matters, Hagar. . .

—from The Nakedness of the Fathers
[Rutgers University Press, 1994]

States in the 1960s to continue my higher education. A few years later, I was invited to be a panelist at a conference on religion and feminism. In those days, Muslim presence at feminist conferences was negligible. During that conference I discovered that Hagar was not an honored figure in this culture. The shocking discovery took place when a Christian panelist critiqued the negative images attached by patriarchy to certain biblical women. As the panelist detailed the negative image of Hagar, the audience was nodding in recognition. I was astounded. Hagar? Was she not the righteous wife of Abraham?!

I came across the negative image again on various occasions in academic circles. In some conversations, I detected classist snobbery. She was Sarah's maid, I was told, who was later banished by Sarah. In others I detected a classist defense. She was an Egyptian princess given by the Pharaoh to Abraham. It then occurred to me that I never had a conversation about Hagar with other Muslims. So, I turned to Islamic history books. There they were, the same two classist stereotypes, the maid/slave and the free woman/princess. I found the same in Hebrew sources.

I really do not care whether Hagar was Sarah's maid or an Egyptian princess or both. Emotionally and historically she is my foremother, and I am concerned not about class status but about her being uprooted from her homeland Egypt and given by order of the Pharaoh to Abraham. What kind of a heart-wrenching experience is that, I ask myself. Did she cry herself to sleep every night in a foreign land with no friends, the way I did when I first came to this country? How did she feel when all her social privileges were suddenly stripped away and she was reduced to waiting on another, her liberty denied, her hopes smothered, her life appropriated? If this is her whole story what lessons must I take from it? Is this displacement—billed as a transaction between Abraham and the Pharaoh—the only legacy I receive from Hagar?

Abraham himself was an exalted prophet who discovered God's truth on his own and paid dearly for his discovery by leaving his people. Could it be that Hagar, like Abraham, did not fit among her own people? That she liked the truth that Abraham was teaching? That she convinced the Pharaoh to let her go, in order to follow Abraham's God? Ibn Kathir's account allows for that possibility. He simply says that she was an Egyptian Copt who accompanied Abraham and his people upon their return from Egypt. Am I overreaching in reconstructing the story of my ancestor in a less patriarchal way, by picturing Hagar as instrumental in shaping her own life?

Consider also this. According to various sources, including the Tafsir of al-Tabari and Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah of Ibn Kathir, when Abraham took Hagar away Ishmael was still a nursing baby. Abraham travelled with them until he reached a barren land, then he prepared to leave them there. Alarmed, Hagar asked her husband repeatedly: "O Abraham, where are you going, leaving us in this valley which has no humans, nothing?" Each time, Abraham avoided looking at her. Finally, Hagar asked: "Did God order you to do this?"

Abraham said: "Yes." Hagar answered: "Then God will not abandon us." Abraham left, and as soon as his family could no longer see him, he raised his hands to God in a prayer mentioned in the Qur'an (14:37). He said: "O God, I have made some of my offspring dwell in a valley without cultivation, by your Sacred House, in order O God that they may establish regular prayer. So fill the hearts of some people with love towards them and feed them of fruits, so that they may give thanks."

The sun got hotter and the baby and Hagar got thirstier. Finally, Hagar's milk dried up. Like a loving mother she agonized looking at her baby suffer. But she was an active woman, a solution-oriented woman. So she ran around looking for food and water. Seven times, in the heat of the desert, did she run up and down between two hills looking for a solution, asking God for one. None was in sight. And the baby cried. Imagine that moment. Close your eyes and feel the heat, the tears, the infant's suffering. Then Ishmael kicked the ground with his two little feet (some say an angel hearing Ishmael cry touched the ground with his wing) and a spring of water burst under them. They drank, they survived, as God had promised.

To this day, Muslims on pilgrimage in Mecca relive Hagar's ordeal. Male and female they repeat Hagar's seven trips between the two hills of Safa and Marwah. When done, they drink from Zamzam, the spring that little Ishmael's foot set free. They also circle the Ka'bah, the first house of God built on this earth by Abraham and Ishmael.

And what about Sarah? If Hagar was willing to be abandoned for the sake of God, is it too much to believe that Sarah too was an active participant in this righteous family and did her own share of submitting to God's will? Can we also acquit her of the sins of jealousy and vengeance that the Abrahamic traditions have long attached to her because of how she is described as having treated Hagar? After all, we know that she was a righteous woman. She was not only Abraham's wife, she shared his beliefs. So, how could this good woman be guilty of jealousy and injustice?

Of course a traditional male theologian will quickly answer that regardless of her virtues, a woman is jealous by nature, and Sarah (despite her righteousness) is no exception to the rule. This patriarchal response suffocates me. There is nothing in the Qur'an to bind me to this view. I'd rather think that in a family of righteous people, Sarah is no exception. The separation of the brothers Ishmael and Isaac was God's will. It gave rise to two different lines of Abraham, both blessed, one mostly from within his tribe, the other from the very start so ethnically diverse as to bring his message to the world as a whole. This is God's wisdom still unfolding. Why not just accept it, rather than impose our stereotypes on it? After all, the Qur'an (16:74) does tell us that God knows what we do not know. ■

Azizah al-Hibri is an Associate Professor of Law at the University of Richmond. She is also a member of the Advisory Board of the American Muslim Council and founder and former president of Karamah: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights.

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION: WAS HAGAR THE FIRST?

Some Islamic sources tell us that Sarah became very jealous of Hagar because of her youth and her fertility, and decided to disfigure her in order to make her less feminine. That is how, we are told, female circumcision originated—as an act of aggression by one woman against another.

At this point, I take a deep breath. I feel myself drowning in an ocean of patriarchal nonsense. The Qur'an, which briefly refers to Sarah, does not present a negative image of her. Furthermore, many of the same historians who accused her of being a jealous woman gone out of control also point out that Sarah was not only extremely beautiful but righteous as well. In fact, according to Ibn Kathir, some Muslim scholars attributed the status of "prophet" to Sarah, one of only three women so designated. So why should it be imagined that Sarah would commit such an act?

The commentaries suggest that, although both Sarah and Hagar were good women, women are jealous by nature and so Sarah disfigured Hagar. When this myth is recounted, genital mutilation is always judged as a horrendous deed, the result of one otherwise good woman's jealousy of another. So when some Muslim men argue today that genital mutilation is desirable, I wonder if they would also argue that Sarah did a service to Hagar!

—*A.Y. AL-H.*

So "BIG and UGLY"

SOPHIE TUCKER: THE BETTE MIDLER OF HER TIME

BY JOYCE ANTLER

Throughout half a century in show business, Sophie Tucker (born Sonya Abuza) was a wanderer; she called herself a "gypsy of the footlights." From cafe supper clubs to vaudeville, burlesque, musical revues, nightclubs, and concert stages, she toured the United States and Europe. This gypsy of the theater was actually born on the road—her seventeen-year-old mother gave birth to her somewhere on the "long rutted track" out of Russia across Poland, on her way to the Baltic and then to America, to join Tucker's father, who had run away from the Russian military service. Tucker arrived in the United States in 1884 when she was three months old.

After settling in Boston, where they spent eight years, Tucker's parents, Charlie and Jennie Abuza, moved to Hartford and opened Abuza's Home Restaurant . . . . Tucker contributed to the family business by drumming up customers and entertaining them with her singing. Although Jennie Abuza appreciated the tips Tucker brought in, she called her daughter *zovarecha* (wild animal) because she rushed through her household chores to get out of the house. Tucker was already being lured by Hartford's amateur theaters and vaudeville shows; some of Abuza's customers, like Yiddish stars Jacob Adler and Boris Tomashevsky, noticed Tucker's talent and tried to convince her parents to let her join one of the Jewish companies. But neither they nor Tucker, already accumulating experience in amateur shows, was interested; Tucker recognized that Yiddish theater was losing its appeal to the more popular "American" theater. Yet she was beginning to think in earnest about a show business career: "Suppose you could earn a living by singing and making people laugh," she asked herself, "wouldn't that be better than spending your life drudging in a kitchen?"

Enticed by the singer's frank and sultry lyrics, which seemed to promise a freer world for both women and men, a generation grew up listening to her records, often in secret.

Her mother no doubt wished better for Tucker than her own life of domestic toil—she even bought her a piano with her savings but sold it after Tucker, complaining that her stubby fingers could not play scales and arpeggios, refused to practice—yet her advice was traditional. "After you are through school," she told Tucker, "then you must look around for a good, steady young man and get married. . . . Don't have anything to do with traveling men, or with show people. There are too many grifters and grafters among them. They have no real homes; no sense of responsibility." They were like gypsies who used to wander through Russia, "Thieving and making trouble."

In no time at all, Tucker did find a man to marry, a handsome

neighbor, Louis Tuck, a beer-wagon trucker, who made the awkward overweight girl feel like a desirable belle of the ball. A week after her high school graduation, they eloped, although Jennie insisted on an Orthodox wedding when the couple returned. Tucker became pregnant almost immediately; when her son, Bert, was born, the Tucks moved in with the Abuzas, and she found herself back in the restaurant kitchen, chopping vegetable and washing dishes.

Tuck left her when she insisted he work harder to support the family; Sophie then ran off to New York to try her luck as a singer, leaving the baby with her parents. Although in her autobiography she doesn't dwell on her emotions at leaving home, she does describe the condemnation she experienced and her pangs of guilt. When she returned for her first visit after two years away, her mother's hair had turned white and her son barely recognized her; he called Tucker's sister "Mama." Tucker learned that though her family had forgiven her, the neighbors had not. "They said only a bad woman would do such a thing. I must be a bad woman—a whore, in the unvarnished language of the Scriptures." Her sister and son were ridiculed because Tucker "wore paint on her face"; because she had gone on the stage and left her child, she was considered "no good." Tucker vowed not to return to Hartford until she had become a star, and remained away for more than five years.

Her autobiography, *Some of These Days*, does not dwell on these hurts, focusing instead on her rise in show business. At every turn, she stresses the need for independence, preparation, and determination. At age seventeen, Sophie changed her name to Tucker, which seemed more melodious, and began her career by talking her way into appearances at Greenwich Village restaurants. Wherever she went, she cultivated friendships with producers, stagehands, waiters, and customers, which she knew could be useful to her. Before long she was playing in trendy rathskellers, earning $100 to $150 a week—substantial sums in 1906, and ones that allowed her to avoid prostitution, a trap into which many young performers on their own descended. She assuaged her conscience by wiring much of her pay to Hartford.

As Tucker tells her life story, luck plays as large a role as strategy. Her first triumph was as a blackface performer, for example, but it was only "by accident" that she donned the disguise. When the manager of the amateur night at a Harlem theater spotted her preparing to go on, he shouted to an assistant: "This one's so big and ugly the crowd out front will razz her. Better get some cork and black her up." Although she protested, within weeks Tucker was booked on the small-time vaudeville circuit; for the next six years, from 1906 to 1912, she was the World-Renowned Coon Shouter, Sophie Tucker, the Ginger Girl, the Refined Coon Singer, and Sophie Tucker, Manipulator of Coon Melodies. For Tucker, one of the first female entertainers to use blackface, the mask worked as well as it did for Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson, who were Jewish, and for Bert Williams, a West Indian. Audiences accepted her southern accent ("as thick and smooth as molasses," she described it) and her appearance; after a while, she began to use "high yellow" rather than jet black. "When I would pull off one of my gloves and show that I was white there'd be a sort of surprised gasp, then a howl of laughter." So she began interpolating Yiddish words, "Just to give the audience a kick," she joked, but perhaps to declare as well who she really was.

If Tucker resented the blackface, it was because it prevented her from appearing as herself, like the prettier girls; blackface denied her femaleness, not her ethnicity (in fact, with her hearty deep voice, critics used to refer to her as a "male impersonator"). She had little to say about the racial stereotyping endemic in the costumes, gestures, and lyrics that were part of her act. The style was ubiquitous in vaudeville, inherited from the popular minstrel shows of the nineteenth century, although by the turn of the century newer forms of burlesque had begun to replace it. For ethnic entertainers eager to show that they were "real" Americans, "coon" singing had guaranteed benefits. With African Americans the butt of their humor, immigrant vaudevillians demonstrated that, however "foreign" their own cultures might be viewed, blacks (with their supposed emotionalism and crude physicality) were even more inferior. Yet as some scholars suggest, blackface also embodied a plaintive note expressing the pain of rootlessness so deeply a part of the immigrant experience.

Although blackface molded Tucker's performance style, enhancing the physicality of her performance and introducing her to the modern syncopated style of music that would facilitate her later embrace of jazz, she chafed at its restrictions and denial of her femininity. Yet she was afraid to go on stage

"LIFE BEGINS AT FORTY" (Sexy Sophie)

"In the twenties and the thirties
you're just an amateur,
but after you've reached forty
you become a connoisseur.
Then it isn't grab and get it,
and a straight line for the door—
you're not hasty, you're tasty,
if you enjoy things so much more.
For instance, a novice gulps his
brandy down, he doesn't
understand;
observe a connoisseur, the way he
holds it in his hands—
how he strokes the glass, fondles
it, warms it as he should,
smacks his lips, slowly sips: boy it
tastes good."

JACK YELLEN MUSIC, PUBLISHER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROBERT ABUSA THANKS TO SARAH BLACHER COHEN

without it. The opportunity to discard blackface arose when a Brooklyn theater manager, pretending that her trunk was lost, sent her on without it. Then another "accident" occurred that would redirect Tucker's career. Dressed one night in a tightly laced black princess gown (like a "boloney in mourning," Tucker recalled), with a long train of red chiffon ruffles, she slipped during her bows and caught her heel in the ruffles of her dress: "Down I went on my fanny like a ton of bricks." The applause was deafening; even the cast shrieked with laughter. Tucker, the comedienne, was born.

Another transition in Tucker's career came when she began to incorporate "double entendre" songs into her routine. Years before, a songwriter had told her that because she was "big and gawky, and entirely lacking in 'allure,'" she could sing sexy material that, if used by attractive performers, would seem salacious and offensive. Soon her routine was set—first a "lively" rag, then a ballad, a comedy song, a novelty number, and finally the "hot" or sexy song, which would leave the audience "laughing their heads off." ("She sings the words we used to write on the sidewalks," Eddie Cantor once commented.)

Tucker insisted that her songs, however off-color, were "all moral"; they had to do with sex, not vice. But the secret of her success was that they were all in the first person, poking fun at her own sexual mishaps. As she learned when she slipped on her backside, audiences found personal distress funny; they laughed, but with the knowledge that they too could suffer from romantic misfortune. By hinting at her own sexual experimentation and revealing the details of her romantic life (after Louis Tuck there were two more husbands), she liberated her audience's imagination.

So Tucker—the overweight immigrant girl from Hartford—became the doyenne of the innuendo song, famous for her wiggles and shakes and for songs with titles like "Nobody Loves a Fat Girl But How a Fat Girl Can Love," "That Lovin' Soul Kiss," "Everybody Shimmies Now," "Vamp, Vamp, Vamp," and "Who Paid the Rent for Mrs. Rip Van Winkle When Rip Van Winkle Was Away?" Once she was hauled into court in Portland, Oregon, for obscene gestures—she had run her fingers suggestively down her body—but the case was dismissed. Other shows were canceled because "sizzling" songs were on the playbill.

Just as she had fashioned every new departure in her career, Tucker used her size and unattractiveness to construct a "red-hot" persona that defied cultural expectations. At a time when vaudeville and burlesque were becoming increasingly subdued as they reached out to a broader family audience, Tucker managed to elude censorship; her "ugliness" was a new mask, one that gave her the freedom to transgress. Using humor and self-mockery, she sang her "hot" torch songs about women's sexual passions and romantic agonies: all women, even "big, ugly ones," needed sex and love; it was men's failures in bed and marriage that denied women their due. Inattentive as lovers, unreliable as husbands, the men she sang about were not very different from the *shlemiels* and *paskudnicks* her mother used to warn her against. In this way, at least, Tucker was her mother's daughter.

Tucker's routines may have been comic and ribald (some would have said vulgar), yet they reveal her as an early champion of women's liberation. Exposing the inevitable pathos of love and romance, she insisted upon women's right to sexual fulfillment and portrayed them as strong, indomitable, and independent. "Make Him Say Please," "You Can't Deep Freeze a Red-Hot Mama," "I'm Living Alone and I Like It," and "I Ain't Takin' Orders From No One" were among the songs that brought her message to receptive audiences, especially after 1916, when she began playing evening supper clubs rather than family-oriented vaudeville, which eschewed risqué lyrics.

But it was not only as a self-styled raunchy blues singer—a "Red-Hot [American] Mama"—that Sophie Tucker reached the height of stardom. At the start of World War I, with her eye, as always, on marketability, she surmised that the American public might respond especially well to songs with emotional appeal. For this reason, she introduced the ballad "M-O-T-H-E-R, the Word that Means the World To Me" into her act. She did not introduce her most famous song, "My Yiddishe Mama," into her repertoire, however, until 1925, a few months after her mother's death.

Jennie Abuza's influence over Tucker had continued even after Tucker became a star. "No matter how set up I was with myself, the minute I set foot in Ma's house I had to fall in line with the rules of an old-fashioned, religious household," she recalled. "I had to stop being the headliner and the boss, and remember I was just a daughter. . . ." After Tucker became famous, her mother's friends made peace with her apostasy in leaving home, but they too treated her like a little girl. "You yell just as loud in the theater as you did in the restaurant," one of them told her.

LAST OF THE RED HOT MOMMAS

"Cause I'm the last of the red hot mommas,
I'm gettin' hotter all the time.
Said I'm the last of the red hot mommas,
they've all cooled down but me.
I don't peck, I only neck 'em,
I'm one momma who loves to reckon—
I can make em sizzle, make 'em fry
and fizzle,
and if you want to know the truth,
I can warm the coldness and give the old
ones
back their flaming youth.
Right now I'm in loving prime—
others don't know what it's all about—
say, when I kiss men, they feel they've had
their tonsils taken out.
'Cause I'm the last of the red hot mommas,
I'm getting hotter all the time!"

WRITTEN BY MILTON BERLE, JERRY SEELEN AND LEE POSKRISS. USED WITH PERMISSION FROM ASCAP.

Tucker's visits never lasted long. Instead, she showered her mother with gifts, including a pair of diamond earrings that Jennie traded on the streetcar for a pair of bigger blue stones that turned out to be glass. She brought Jennie to New York to see her show, treating her to the best restaurants, although Jennie refused to eat because the food wasn't kosher. One time, the waiter brought twelve sterling-silver teapots for Tucker's party. Jennie thought they wouldn't miss one, and slipped a teapot into her coat pocket. Sophie played a joke by asking the manager of the restaurant to call her mother and tell her she would be arrested for theft. Remembering the Cossacks, Jennie was terrified.

But there was no question that Tucker saw her mother as a forceful, courageous figure. She starts her autobiography, in fact, by describing her mother's guts, her *dreistige*. But although Tucker's respect for Jennie was deep, it was mixed with not a little guilt and perhaps some resentment. Jennie died when Tucker was crossing the Atlantic, returning from an engagement in London where she had become a superstar; Tucker was grateful that, as she lay dying, Jennie had asked that the funeral be delayed until Tucker arrived. Tucker realized that in suspending her Orthodox beliefs (which called for immediate burial), her "darling yiddishe mama" was demonstrating "how much she loved me and how well she understood my love for her." But that she could not say goodbye because she was off like the show business "gypsies" her mother had hated may have left a "stinging mark." Jennie's will divided her possessions among Tucker's brother and sister and a neighbor. But "to my daughter, Sophie, who gave me everything," she gave "nothing because she don't need anything." Was this another "slap," a reminder of Tucker's disobedience as a daughter? Or a recognition of Tucker's show business success?

Because she was "big and gawky, and entirely lacking in 'allure,' she could sing sexy material that, if used by attractive performers, would seem salacious and offensive."

Tucker suffered a nervous breakdown after Jennie died and was unable to work for months. On stage at a benefit for the Jewish Theatrical Guild at the Manhattan Opera House, she stood "paralyzed." Tucker stayed in bed for weeks, her self-confidence gone. "I had a feeling I was done for as a performer," she remembered. Not long after that, Lou Pollack and Jack Yellen, her longtime songwriter and accompanist, wrote "My Yiddishe Mama" for her. She sang it first at the Palace Theater in New York in 1925, and after that everywhere there were Jews. She sang it in English and, for Jewish audiences, in Yiddish as well, and its effect was cathartic. Combining "Victorian sentiment with Tin Pan Alley," as one observer noted, the appeal of the song was universal. Mainstream American audiences appreciated its sentimental motherhood motif; in Yiddish the song commented even more specifically on the bittersweet experience of assimilation.

"Yiddishe Mama" was a nostalgic celebration of the ghetto mother's nurturing warmth and love, her generosity and forgiveness. Its poignancy came from coupling this emotion-laden tribute with the recognition that the child, however grateful to her mother, still had to leave home, to be caught forever between the pull of loneliness and the necessity of independence. The Yiddish mama, as Tucker sang her, existed in a world where parents controlled their children's destiny and offered love with discipline; but it was world of the past that was vanishing even when Tucker herself was growing up. A plaintive, mournful song written in a minor key, it perfectly expressed the predicament of second-generation Jews. Unlike Al Jolson's buoyant "Mammy" and other tributes to mother love by musical comedy performers, it was a song of grief. The other side of the steely determination and breezy humor reflected in Tucker's autobiography, "My Yiddishe Mama" mourned the family closeness that immigrant children lost as they set off on their own paths.

Just as Tucker's "red-hot" number, "Some of These Days," served as her theme song in the United States, "My Yiddishe Mama"—her "Jewish song"—became her signature song in Europe, where it became an anthem for Jews and a target for anti-Semitism. After Hitler came to power, her recordings of the song were ordered smashed and their sale banned throughout the Reich. The song remained a regular part of Tucker's performances through the 1960s, when she was still giving command performances in London and drawing enthusiastic crowds to New York's famed nightclub the Latin Quarter. But the more removed the song grew from the realities of immigrant life, the more sentimental, old-fashioned, and purely nostalgic it became. Not so with Tucker's "hot" songs. Tucker retained her sexual brazenness throughout her long career, enchanting audiences with exuberant, bawdy performances that ridiculed conventional gender roles and championed sexual liberation. Enticed by the singer's frank and sultry lyrics, which seemed to promise a freer world for both women and men, a generation of young Americans grew up listening to her records, often in secret. The last of the "red-hot mamas," Tucker died in 1966; although not a "nice Jewish girl" by the standards of her mother's generation, she was one of America's earliest and most influential "popular culture" feminists.

The above essay is excerpted with permission from The Journey Home: Jewish Women and the American Century, *written by Joyce Antler and published by The Free Press, 1997.*

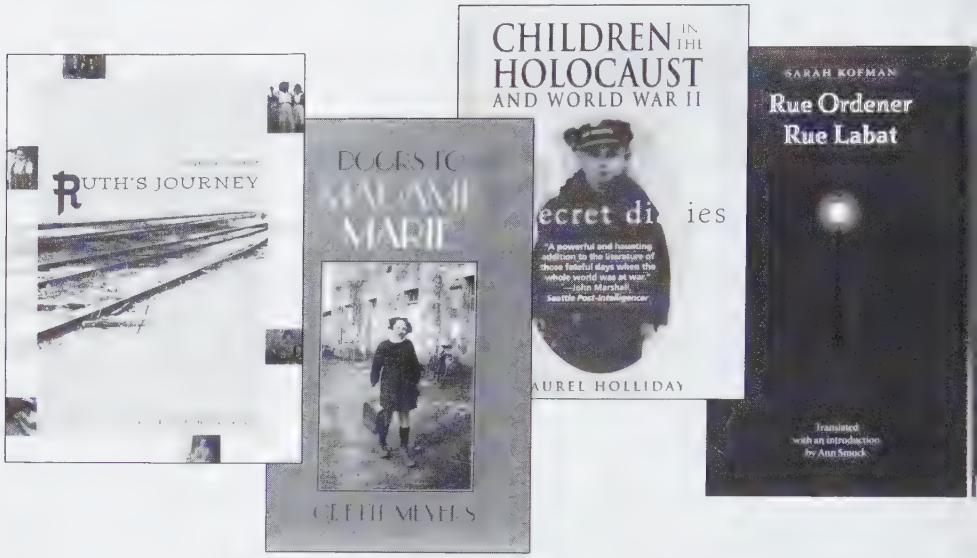
REVIEWS

CHILDREN IN THE HOLOCAUST AND WORLD WAR II: THEIR SECRET DIARIES
edited by Laurel Holliday
Washington Square Press, $12.00

DOORS TO MADAME MARIE
by Odette Meyers
University of Washington Press, $24.00

A SURVIVOR'S MEMOIR: RUTH'S JOURNEY
by Ruth Glasberg Gold
University Press of Florida, $34.95

RUE ORDENER, RUE LABAT
by Sarah Kofman
translated from the French by Ann Smock
The University of Nebraska Press, $10.00



Popular culture has nominated Anne Frank as the archetypal child of the Holocaust. Until recently, other Jewish youngsters who survived the war in hiding have not had their suffering validated. German reparation authorities continually deny payments to child survivors on the "logic" that they do not remember. How can these children be suffering, the argument goes, if they did not see, hear, feel, smell, or touch death every moment during the German Occupation.

After reading these four intimate, terror-filled memoirs, the skeptic's questions about child survivors' traumas should dissipate. The recollections of Odette Meyers and Sarah Kofman in France, Ruth Glasberg Gold in Transnistria, and the collection of children's diaries edited by Laurel Holliday are adding to the once-muted voices of youngsters who went to a man-made hell and, for the most part, came back. These personal journeys into the abyss dispel another myth: that individuals who forget horrendous persecutory episodes are better adjusted than those who remember. Indeed, the creative process of remembering and writing about Holocaust experiences is a constructive tool for mourning—for some survivors, a never-ending psychological salve.

For the rescued child, mourning raises questions of loyalty and disloyalty to the birth mother, and to the Christian foster mother—and specifically to the religious beliefs they hold. In Odette Meyers' poetic rendition of life in post-war Paris, she resists giving up her adopted love for Jesus, Mary, the Church, and her desire to become a nun. Though Meyers' altruistic rescuer, Madame Marie, attempts to tell the 12-year-old Odette that she belongs with the Jewish people and with their God, the girl develops a nervous tick that surfaces when she decides to stop wearing the cross. Concerned that without the cross she would not survive high school, Odette returns to wearing it, her inner conviction maintained.

Sarah Kofman's savior, on the other hand, attempts to gain a daughter by rescuing her, and does not ease Kofman's efforts in forming a bond with her own mother. On the contrary, her rescuer impedes Kofman's attachment to her natural mother. Written in a concise and spare style, this unresolved conflict torments Kofman—one of France's leading social critics—who committed suicide before the book was published in France three years ago. This fifth and final brief autobiographical sketch, eloquently translated and introduced by a French professor at Berkeley, was undoubtedly the most onerous part of Kofman's examination of the mental torture of a rescuer who was relentless in seeking her love.

Secret diaries kept by children in the Holocaust and World War II, from my own favorite heroine Hannah Senesh to an unknown brother and sister in the Lodz Ghetto, give us a glimpse of the horrific daily life of children and adolescents. When we think we have heard it all, we confront petrified youngsters who helplessly watched their parents killed, who witnessed people being buried alive. We ask ourselves, how did they go on, in their adult lives, to trust, to love, to have children, and to contribute to society?

Ruth Glasberg Gold's journey from Transnistria—a territory that yielded very few memoirs—speaks directly to these questions. As an 11-year old, Glasberg Gold was orphaned and lost her only brother, a musical prodigy. She survived a massacre of 250,000 Jews and wandered from foster home to orphanages to refugee camps. After liberation, she undertook the long and difficult journey of illegal entry to Palestine, healing herself by nurturing others she joined in building a kibbutz, working as a medic and nurse.

The child-survivor Holocaust memoirs are a unique genre. Among these memoirs, the female experience especially draws us into a world of relationships, identity, emotions, and resilience under terror. In giving us the details of their own travails, these writers undermine the anonymity of the Holocaust experience.

Eva Fogelman, Ph.D, a social psychologist and psychotherapist, is the author of Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust *and co-editor of* Children During the Nazi Reign.

GENDER AND ASSIMILATION IN MODERN JEWISH HISTORY: THE ROLES AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

by Paula E. Hyman
University of Washington Press, Seattle
$30.00 hardcover, $14.95 paperback

Paula Hyman's masterful and provocative Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History serves provides a most lucid synthesis of two key issues in modern Jewish history: assimilation and the intimate connection between it and shifts in the meaning of gender for Jews as they confronted modernity.

Hyman, a distinguished historian of the modern Jewish experience is an author (with Sonya Michel and Charlotte Baum) of the book that launched scholarly study and public discussion of the history of Jewish women: The Jewish Woman in America (1976). Her knowledge of modern Jewish history, her intelligent mastery and use of gender theory, and her linguistic abilities in Yiddish and Hebrew ensure that this is a solidly grounded work. Hyman's book offers an analysis of the ways in which Jewish women and men encountered modernity through the issue of gender. Both sides of the question—"modernization" (here referred to as assimilation) and "the roles and representation of women"—have constantly played off against each other. According to Hyman, neither historical trajectory can be understood without its linkage to the other. As Jews, men in particular, started in the late eighteenth century in Western and Central Europe to imagine some kind of equality with the non-Jews around them, they entered into a complicated project by which they tried to remake themselves. How much about themselves they wanted to remake varied over time and place, but a key element involved the renegotiation of the relationship between men and women.

Germany, England, France, Central Europe had a different history vis-a-vis their Jews than did Russia, Poland, and the lands of eastern Europe. The Jewish encounter with modernity in the West began earlier, drew out over a longer time period, moved with fits and starts, and held more realistic prospects for assimilation. The possibilities for an integrated civic life, in which Jews

"Jewishness, Judaism, the Jewish world came increasingly to be the world of the home and, as such, the world of women."

who lived in Germany could become Germans, were basically offered to Jewish men. Jewish women, because of the gendered division of the non-Jewish world around them, had fewer places where they could become assimilated into the larger society. While their worlds changed too, and they spent more of their time in the domestic sphere and less in the world of the marketplace in which they had heretofore been active, Jewish women lagged in the assimilation process. Ironically, assimilation for these women made them "more Jewish." Jewishness, Judaism, the Jewish world came increasingly to be the world of the home and, as such, the world of women.

A different dynamic took place in eastern Europe. In this key section of the book, Hyman uses education as the metaphor and the vehicle by which to trace the processes of assimilation and changes in women's roles. Here, women may have actually spearheaded the assimilatory process. Before modernity in the East, traditional Jewish life was rigidly divided into a male and a female zone; because of the centrality of Jewish learning to sustaining that world, women–because of their relative unimportance–could become more educated than men in the languages and cultures of the larger society. Highly traditional parents, whose sons immersed themselves only in the traditional texts of Jewish learning, very likely allowed their daughters to learn foreign languages and other "unimportant" subjects. What were the implications of this gendered contact with Russian culture? What did it mean when these young women, as well as their brothers, migrated to America?

The book traces the movement of the Jewish women and men of these European regions to the United States, where they played out the drama of their European assimilations in the context of America. Hyman deals with education, politics, work, religious practice and, most importantly, women's consciousness as they experienced this transition. She has studied the ways in which women attempted to shape their own destiny, while at the same time the men around them, community leaders in particular, blamed them for the decline of Judaism.

—Hasia R. Diner

Hasia R. Diner is the Steinberg Professor of American Jewish history at New York University. She is the author of In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915-1995, Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century, *and* A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880, *the second volume in the Johns Hopkins University Press series* The Jewish People in America.

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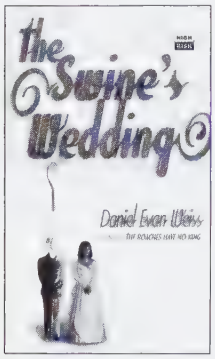
THE SWINE'S WEDDING

by Daniel Evan Weiss
Serpent's Tail, 1996, $17.99



The Swine's Wedding is a campy novel about the problems of intermarriage as seen through the eyes of a Jewish mother and her son's non-Jewish fiancée. Through these two women's diaries, written as they plan for the wedding, we get an unusual view into family politics, religious identity and some very dysfunctional relationships.

When Solomon Beneviste decides to marry Allison Pennybaker, his mother, Miriam, is unhappy. Allison wants a church wedding, and in order to keep her future mother-in-law out from underfoot, she suggests that Miriam put together a family history of the Benevistes instead. As Miriam delves deeper into historical archives around the world, she begins to discover the Beneviste family's chilling experiences during the Spanish Inquisition.

"We WASPs measure time by the expiration dates on milk cartons. You saw the whole wide long horrible picture," writes Allison as she comes to understand Miriam distress. Her sympathy, however, is not nearly enough to stave off the novel's bizarre climax.

Weiss's novel is addictive, drawing the reader in with hints of a grizzly future and a terrifying past. Between those two temporal extremes, the reader is entertained by Weiss's hilarious characters, each one stranger than the last. He balances this light-hearted portrayal with a horrifying, detailed look at the suffering of the Spanish Jews, though at times he is in danger of conflating the humor and the horror.

—Natalie Blitt

TESSIE & PEARLIE

by Joy Horowitz
Scribner, New York
$20.50 hardcover, $12.00 paperback

In *Tessie & Pearlie*, Joy Horowitz presents a schmaltzy but engaging collage of her grandmothers' lives. Compiled from taped interviews, letters and remembered miscellany, the loose construction of the book mirrors the patchwork that is memory. "The fabric of memory is a twisted, if delicate, weave of truth and fiction. How we remember, how we come to believe certain memories—based on family myth or the slapdash way a photograph is framed—is certainly as much a reality as the event itself." Horowitz interweaves recipes for latkes with observations that her grandmothers are "mavens of the epistemological." Photos and naturalization papers are interspersed with a "Bubbe Sex Survey," and a stuffed cabbage "Bubbe Bake-Off."

Horowitz is at her best when she allows her grandmothers' voices to come through. Although at times she can be heavy-handed with her own asides, her writing reveals Tessie and Pearlie as strikingly different women, each remarkable in her own way. From *kashrut* to illegal abortion, their first kisses, and their fear of death, the conversations build on a tension between memory and mortality.

Tessie's wry affection is almost superstitiously pessimistic. She insists that "I still don't like that you're talking about me. I don't want to be popular. . . . It's my simple

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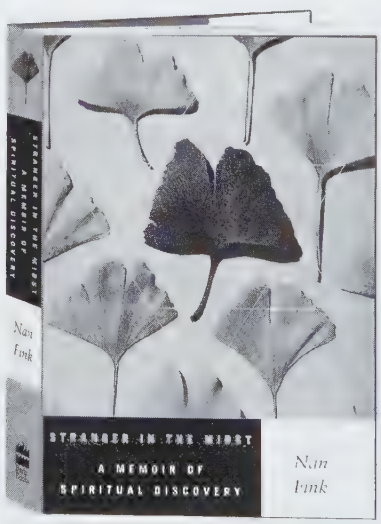

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life. But it is so." Her reticence hides a quiet strength of character, which shows itself in many instances. Having been re-named Tessie at Ellis Island, to her dislike, she has reclaimed her given name for the future, stipulating that her tombstone will read: Toby Bat Chaim Teitel. "This is the way I like it."

Pearlie, in contrast, is vibrant and wise-cracking, even as she voices her fears of death. Of Pearlie, Horowitz writes, "There is an injunction in the Talmud: When a man faces his Maker, he will have to account for those pleasures of life he failed to experience. From that standpoint, Pearlie will have little accounting to do, presuming the injunction applies to women too."

The counterpoint between grandmothers and granddaughter draws all their memories together, and leaves a vivid imprint of all three women's lives.

—Sarah Wallis

THE DYBBUK OF DELIGHT: AN ANTHOLOGY OF JEWISH WOMEN'S POETRY

edited by Sonja Lyndon and Sylvia Paskin
Five Leaves Publications
(P.O. Box 81, Nottingham, U.K. NG5 4ER)
£49.99 plus £1. postage

Relationships, death, food, childhood, war, religion, identity and sexuality—all are included in this wide-ranging collection of poems by 62 British Jewish women. Here is Micheline Wandor's feisty dialogue between Eve and Lilith:

"Eve: It's none of my business
but you must have done something very special
to make a man
remember you so.
Lilith: I merely said no . . ."

And then we hear Lilith reveal, "I am the dybbuk of delight/I slip into the souls/of those who need me."

In the late 1930s, a large number European Jewish children were separated from their families and brought to England through the Kinderstransporte. Their memories are captured in several poems, most subtly and poignantly in "Between the Lines" by Adele Geras. Dated 1938, it expresses a daughter's longing for her mother: "Mama darling everything is fine/(where are you where is your smell when you kiss me)/Everyone is being very kind/(but sometimes I do not know what they are saying)."

Food wafts out of the pages: Miriam Halahmy brings the smell and the emotion of "the grandmother and the child/making kubeh in my kitchen/the ancient way" into the reader's kitchen, while psychotherapist Valerie Sinason muses on the Passover seder: "what a way to make a family eat together—/curses, bitter herbs and chicken soup."

Although there are Jewish words (kaddish, Shabbat, Jerusalem) and lots of "Jewish" feelings (loss, alienation, ambivalence) in this collection, it is disappointing that the vast majority of the poems are empty of Jewish knowledge. *The Dybbuk of Delight* is a credit to the oft-neglected creative output of British Jewish women, but the question remains: is being a Jewish woman enough to claim entry to a Jewish women's anthology?

—Sally Berkovic

SAPPHIRES

by Sara Dowse
Penguin, Victoria. $14.95 (Australian Dollars)

In her new novel *Sapphires*, Sara Dowse shows great promise as a writer who may yet write a Jewish women's novel infused with deeper Jewish sources. Dowse begins with a lovely account of Evelyn Hazelwood recalling her grandmother reading the *Tzena U'rena* (Yiddish translation of the Bible with commentaries) and the tale of a young girl hiding precious gems.

Sapphires then dissolves into a hodgepodge of Jewish women's history refracted through Evelyn's experiences. Her grandmother brought the family to America, her mother became an actress, and Evelyn ends up in Sydney, Australia, following Paul, who came to America to play rugby. References to Jewish mysticism, folklore and Jewish women's contemporary lives across the globe make interesting reading but do not hold the plot together. Like Evelyn, Dowse was born in America, and moved to Australia 20 years later; perhaps the book would have been more compelling as her own autobiography.

—S.B.

NEW YEAR'S EVE

by Lisa Grunwald
Crown Publishers, $24.00

New Year's Eve is a vivid and fascinating fictional journey into the lives of adult twin sisters whose relationship is marked by rivalry, tragedy and questions of loyalty.

Erica is the younger of the twins, the conciliatory daughter who safeguards the family connections and memories. Watching her father and sister as the novel opens, Erica explains: "here is what I really wanted: I wanted to have these people around me always. I wanted our fights and our speculations, our triangles, duels, and solitary pouts. I wanted us to live under the same large, actual roof, attending our various joys and pains, and not being forced, as we always were, into the fragmented future."

Heather, by contrast, is the forward-moving twin, the "successful" twin who married first, had a child first and works as a doctor. When Erica and Heather become pregnant at the same time, Erica sees it as a chance for the two of them to go back to their childhood closeness.

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For a while, things go as she hopes: Erica and Heather bond through their pregnancy and, later, Erica's daughter Sarah and Heather's son David become the best of friends. But when David is suddenly killed and Sarah begins to believe that she can communicate with him in heaven, Erica finds that the closeness she has developed with her sister is severely challenged.

Grunwald, author of two previous novels and a children's book, here gives us a beautiful and intriguing book about memory, loyalty and sisterhood. —*N.B.*

THE REFORMER'S APPRENTICE

by Harriet Rochlin
Fithian Press, 1996, $19.95

The Reformer's Apprentice is a sweet but slight novel about a young Jewish woman's coming-of-age in late 19th century San Francisco. Frieda Levie is a bright, 17-year-old dedicated to the "Sisters of Service," a women's rights and community service organization. When Frieda's family suddenly loses its money and starts a boarding house in a poor section of San Francisco, Frieda finds herself pulled between social reform and the realities that the world presents. Her two dreams—of falling in love and of "making the world a better place"—clash with her family's desire to marry her off to one of the residents of their boarding house. The real interest in this novel lies in Rochlin's depiction of Jewish immigrant life in San Francisco during this period, as well as her portrayal of the early women's rights movement.

—*N.B.*

AN INTRICATE WEAVE: WOMEN WRITE ABOUT GIRLS AND GIRLHOOD

edited by Marlene Miller
Iris Editions, 1997, $15.95

There may be few things as unsettling as reading about girlhood: the vulnerability, the lack of control, not understanding of how the world works. Which is what makes *An Intricate Weave*, a collection of 70 stories, testimonials and poems about girls and girlhood very much worth the read. If you can bear the hints of your own reflection, this is a fascinating anthology.

The girls who are the subjects of anthology, real and fictional, are of all ages and background. There are a few identifiably Jewish authors and stories (including one by LILITH's own fiction editor Faye Moskowitz), but the stories, regardless of the specifics, are the stories of all girls. They transcend the particulars of plot, personalities and location and capture instead those common moments of fear, excitement, trepidation, questioning, love and happiness. They are about getting your first bra, your first kiss, a best friend, about what it's like to see parents fight, having crushes on older girls and much more.

Miriam Karmel Feldman's "What Does Madonna Know" summons up the painful moment when a friend's grandmother says: "Look at those 'poulkies,' would you?" She writes: "I was eight years old and until that moment I had never thought about my thighs—their size, shape, being. But all that changed with Yetta's gaze. From that moment on I would never think of myself

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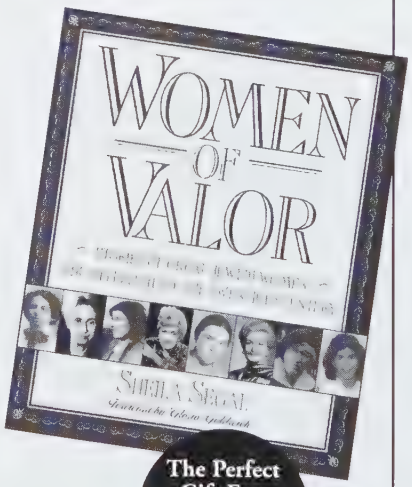

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as just a girl. Forevermore, I would be a girl with fat thighs."

In Elizabeth Graver's "What Kind of Boy," a 12-year-old girl grows up when her family moves away from their home for a year. There is something so familiar about how she begins her year away: "In my lime green diary with its gold lock, I recorded certain vows at the beginning of that year: *1. STOP Playing with Dolls; 2. Get better Clothes and do better in Math; 3. Come back home and be Friends with the Popular kids. 4. Stop Smoking (ha ha just kidding!!!!).*"

While it's unsettling to live through, it's empowering to look back on girlhood. Emily Hancock captures this idea in her essay "Growing Up Female" as she focuses on how as grown women we have a lot to learn from our "girl within": "I found that a woman comes fully into her own by circling back to the girl she was at 8, 9, or 10—a girl who knows who she is and what she's about before she gets all cluttered up. This forgotten inner girl harbors a distinct and vital sense of self a woman loses in the process of growing up female."

An Intricate Weave is a phenomenal collection that demonstrates with strong writing the beauty, bravery and pain of being a girl and learning about the world for the first time.

—N.B

FOUNDER OF HASIDISM: A QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL BA'AL SHEM TOV

by Moshe Rosman
University of California Press, $45.00

"The Besht's [Baal Shem Tov's] relationship to Hasidism is analogous to Jesus' relationship to Christianity" writes Rosman, a teacher of Jewish history at Bar Ilan University, in this delightfully intelligible book of scholarship. "Neither consciously founded a new religious movement. The ideals they exemplified in their teachings and by their behavior were adopted, developed, and made into institutions by later figures." Examining the evidence of census records, maps, leases and real estate deeds, Rosman deduces, for example that the Besht—who has been depicted as an outcast and a rebel—had already established a considerable reputation and was well thought of by the Jewish establishment in Miedziebusz since he moved into a house the community made available to him as a "mystic in residence." Along the way Rosman cites in footnotes a few specific sources that might reward a devoted searcher in the quest of women's stories, and he laments the fact there is too little documentation about the roles of women in these times to support much speculation about their lives. Aside from readers

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interested in Hasidism—which has had a wide ranging influence on contemporary Jewish spirituality—others interested in social change and human progress, will find fascinating Rosman's narrative of how later accounts of commonplace events render them more revolutionary than their participants would have imagined.

—Naomi Danis

THE ACTIVIST'S DAUGHTER

by Ellyn Bache
Spinsters Ink: Duluth, MN, $10.95

Ellyn Bache's intricate new novel, *The Activist's Daughter*, is by turns a conventional *bildingsroman* and an unconventional story about growing up in the shadow of Joseph McCarthy and the contemporary civil rights movement. The book follows 17-year-old Beryl Rosinsky as she leaves her home in Washington, D.C., for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Set in 1963, it addresses a panoply of themes: Learning to live with people from other cultures and with different lifestyles; finding one's own voice; and making peace with family members—including a "greenhorn" grandmother, a father whose career was cut short by House Unamerican Activities Committee, and a mother who appears more devoted to social change than to her daughter. The novel also shines a resonant spotlight on a number of historical moments including the assassination of President Kennedy, the murder of four black girls in a Birmingham church, and the development of picket lines to protest segregated restaurants and businesses. Feminist issues are also invoked as the crises and conundrums of late adolescence are explored. Engaging and lively, *The Activist's Daughte* grapples with tough political and social issue and makes no bones about the need fo human connection and a defined sense o human purpose. Sensitive and non-dogmatic this is a moving and insightful novel.

—Eleanor J. Bade

Sally Berkovic is an Australian-born write living in London. Eleanor J. Bader teaches Eugene Lang College of the New School for Socia Research. Sarah Wallis is a freelance writer livin in Berkeley, Calif., and a former intern at Lilith.

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Sex-Segregated Schools

(continued from page 12)

says Rivka Blau, who runs the all-girls, Orthodox Shevach high school in Queens. "It wouldn't work so well if I had boys there. I'm gearing it toward empowering girls Jewishly, . . . letting them know that they can be leaders in the community."

Krauss agrees. "I think that girls do develop better, religiously and secularly, and have chances to be their own people and take leadership positions and feel comfortable expressing their opinions in an all-girl environment." She cites the importance of role-models, the benefits from having no male distractions, the possibilities of leadership—all trademark notions of the secular argument for all-girls schools.

Some educators verge on calling this kind of talk mere rhetoric and are dubious that all-girls Jewish schools are offering anything more than excuses to maintain the status quo. "I would be surprised if the reason that is being giving to you really has to do with creating conditions for the girls to excel. I think it is creating conditions for them to accept . . . that there are certain roles," says Elaine Cohen, educational director of the United Talmud Torah Schools, a collective of four coeducational, multi-denominational, Orthodox-oriented schools in Montreal. "Given the history of [discrimination in] Jewish tradition, I think it is important for them to study coed."

Summer camp, 1985. I have found my way to a job as a counselor-in-training at an all-girls camp. During the summer I drag my way through *Pilgrim's Progress* and a tiny-print version of *Washington Square* in preparation for my 11th grade English class. The girls I work with tease me gently. They also teach me fascinating beauty secrets: how to hold a razor when you shave, and the best time to cut your toenails. We are unembarrassed about our bodies, unafraid to show affection, eager to be smart and capable and loving all at once. I will not fully understand this experience for years, but it comes to mind whenever educators say that girls need to develop their voices away from boys.

But I also understand that those around me—other CIT's, counselors, and campers, of course—wanted me to have a voice, actively looked for it even when I was shy. I understand that without their encouragement, albeit unconscious, even the all-girls context would not have mattered. It is the attitude behind the structure that really made the difference.

"I think it is so interconnected," says Janna Kaplan about traditioanl Judaism's impact on girls. Kaplan, a research scientist in experimental psychology at Brandeis University and a co-organizer of last year's Gender Issues in Jewish Day School Education conference, believes that "one may not be able to pinpoint the exact connection between the degree of empowerment girls (or boys) derive from the [biblical] text study, and their performance in math, for example. But I think that on a very subtle level, these things are interconnected."

Which is what traditional Jewish schools may be able to teach those on the cutting edge of secular single-sex education: that simply creating a school for girls is not enough; that even offering a rigorous course of study isn't enough. Just as the simple act of integrating girls into co-ed schools has not been enough. That a certain feminism—or at least awareness—must guide the school.

It's a lesson that these Jewish girls' schools must learn themselves. At the Orthodox yeshiva she attended in Baltimore, Melissa Klapper tells me that school administrators and teachers "had to walk a tightrope between the parents who wanted their girls to learn calculus and the parents who only wanted their girls to learn to bake challah." The first step will be understanding that baking challah has no place in a discussion of the education of girls. ■

A Convert's Conflict

(continued from page 48)

"Yes, but it isn't my holiday anymore."

My mother's level of exasperation rose sharply. "Surely you're not going to reject your own family, are you?"

"Of course not," I answered guiltily. "It just that I . . ." Realizing that nothing would make her feel better, I stopped. "I'll think about it," I ended.

Later I called to say that I'd drop by to see everyone on Easter, but wouldn't stay for dinner. I thought this was a creative compromise, but it didn't make her happy. "If that's all you can do . . ." she said.

My decision didn't make Michael happy, either. "Easter? You have to see your family on that day, of all days? Aren't you a Jew?"

"But I won't be celebrating," I replied. "And you don't have to come with me."

How did I ever get involved with someone whose family is Christian?" he sighed.

In the end Michael accompanied me to my mother's house. All the relatives were there. At first the atmosphere was strained, as Michael was still a stranger, and his presence in my life bewildered them. We sat in the library having drinks, talking about travel, a neutral subject. But when it came time for them to eat their Easter dinner and us to leave, I didn't want to go. My desire to hold onto my family was stronger than usual, tinged as it was by a feeling of loss. . . .

Converts are pulled between two worlds, and those connected to them are also stretched. The discomfort I and everyone associated with me felt in those days after I converted is not unusual. I've heard stories more painful than mine, of parents disowning their converted children, of ruptures that never heal. . . .

I was in a state of great unsettledness. But how could it have been otherwise? The dip in the *mikveh*, although symbolically important, did not wipe out my history or transform my perception. It didn't help me figure out my relationship to Jews and Gentiles. Years would go by before my identity more fully congealed.

Meanwhile, I had a dream one night. My body was stained with big patches of blue and red. In some places the colors swirled together, like colors on a pallet. I could hardly believe the sight.

Rubbing myself, I found that the colors went deeper than my skin. At first I was alarmed, but I became so engrossed in the intricacies of design that it didn't seem to matter, and the dream drifted elsewhere. ■

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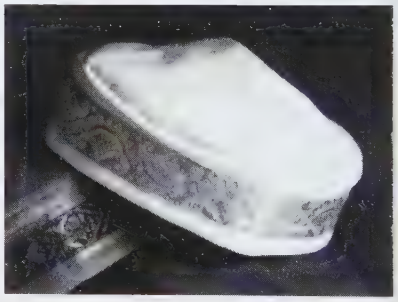

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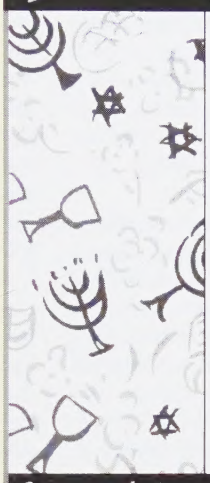

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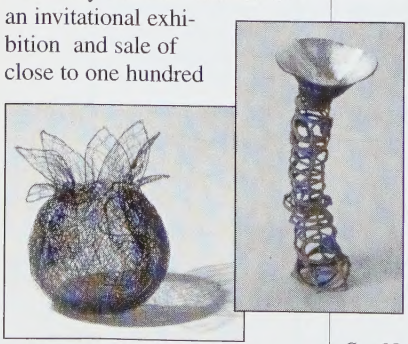

Left: The Source, by Nance Koenigsberg. Right: Untitled (for M.I.) by M. Pels.

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University Without Walls, with teleconference classes ranging from history, religion, and art appreciation to book clubs and support groups for caregivers and the visually impaired, is open to participants in the five boroughs of NYC, Westchester and Long Island. This is one of many programs including volunteer holiday package delivery, "friendly visiting" as well as information referral and counseling, offered by the 20-year-old, not-for-profit agency improving the lives of the homebound and homeless elderly. *Dorot, 171 W. 85th St., New York, NY 10024; (212)769-2850; fax (212)769-4989.*

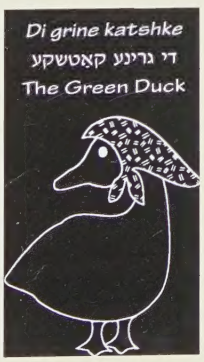
Are you a descendant of Greek-speaking Romaniote Jews from Janina and the environs of Epirus? Did your ancestors settle in the Western areas of Greece (Janina, Preeza, Arta, Corfu) in the first century as part of the Roman Byzantine Empire, and speak a Greek/Judeo language melding Greek Hebrew and Turkish? (It is believed that barely 1,000 surviving Romaniote Jews live today in Greece, Israel, Turkey, England and the US.; 89% of the Jews of Greece were killed during the Holocaust.) On the weekend of May 3-4, the only Romaniote synagogue in America is celebrating its 70th anniversary and opening a museum—mounted initially on the walls of the large women's section of the synagogue. Open to the public thereafter on Sundays from 11am-4pm. Be in touch with your community. Visit *Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue & Museum, 280 Broome St. (near Allen) on the Lower East Side. Write to: KKJSM, Cooper Station, P.O.B. 240, New York, NY 10276; phone (201)763-6110.*

Lesbian, gay, bi- and or transsexual Jews who have left frum communities to come out and those who choose to remain Orthodox are now shooting "Trembling Before God" a feature length film/video documentary in progress about Jews and how they negotiate their sexuality and identity in Hasidic and Orthodox communities in Brooklyn, London, Amsterdam, San Francisco, and Jerusalem. Interviewees are sought—especially those still Orthodox/Hasidic and/or HIV+ or living with AIDS. You may participate in the project in whatever way feels comfortable; strict confidentiality will be respected. Also seeking interns and archival photos, videos, music, stories, help with transcription and Hebrew/Yiddish translation and tax deductible contributions. Contact; *Sandi DuBowski, Tomboychik Productions, 25 Bleecker St., New York, NY 10012; (212)677-6852; email: simcha2000@aol.com*

Got a Jewish folklore or ethnology paper? If you are an undergraduate or graduate students you can win a $100 prize from the Jewish Section of the American Folklore Society and be published in the Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review. Submit entries to *Guy Haskell, Near East and Judaic Languages, Timble 121, Emory University, Atlanta, GA 30322; Ghaskel@emory.edu, or sacksm@saturn. montclair.edu*

YES, YIDDISH!

Lovers of Yiddish culture are invited to sponsor *Di Grine Katshke* (The Green Duck), a new CD of Yiddish animal songs for children featuring performers Lorin Sklamberg, Paula Teitelbaum, Lauren Brody, Adrienne Cooper and others. There's also an 80-page illustrated songbook with lyrics, musical transcriptions, games and an introduction to the songs and the culture that created them. Be a subscriber ($35), supporter ($60), or patron ($100), and you will receive an advance copy of the CD and or book. Send your tax deductible contribution to *Living Traditions, 430 West 14th St. #514, New York, NY 10014; (212)691-1272.*



CANADA

For a book on Canadians in Israel, including those who arrived before statehood, please send on loan (to be returned) memories, anecdotes, personal and family sagas, experiences of early *klita* (absorption), successes, hardships, failures, and recollections of those who returned. Also conditions that inspired *aliyah*, and conditions of life in then Palestine/Israel. Loaned photos will be returned. *Melvin Fenson, P.O.B. 18098, 91180 Jerusalem, Israel; tel/fax 011-972-2-5817749; e-mail: shani@math.huji.ac.il*

Canadian Women's Studies: *les cahiers de la femme*, the feminist quarterly, recently featured a special issue (November 1996, volume 16, #4) on "Jewish Women in Canada." The 136-page volume includes authors who have appeared in LILITH: Fredelle Bruser Maynard, Norma Baumel Joseph, Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, Michele Landsberg, Rabbi Gail Labovitz and many others. Individual copies are $8.56, plus $2.50 postage to Canada and the U.S.; $9 postage international. *CWS/CF, 212 Founders College, York University, 4700 Keele St., North York, Ontario M3J 1PJ; (416)736-5356; fax (416)736-5765; e-mail: cwscf@yorku.ca; http://www.yorku.ca/org/cwscf/home.html*

Prairie Fire: A Canadian Magazine of New Writing has published a special issue of Jewish Canadian Writing (Vol. 17, #3, Autumn 1996). The 270-page issue includes about

cover featuring "The Sabbath Queen" by Esther Warkov, 1994.

30 pieces by women including Carol Matas, Carol Rose, Sybil Shack, and Adele Wiseman. $12.95 from *Prairie Fire Press, 423-100 Arthur St, Winnipeg, MB R3B 1H3; (204)943-9066; fax (204)942-1555.*

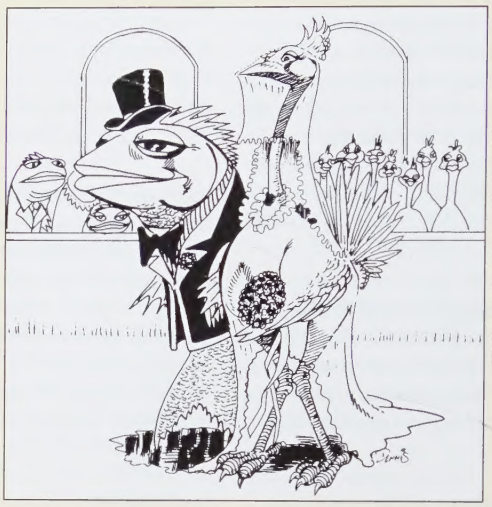
—compiled by Naomi Danis

A Convert's Conflict

A Jew-by-Choice Faces Her Mother's Easter Ham

by Nan Fink

For Nan Fink, co-founder and one-time publisher of Tikkun magazine, the process of converting to Judaism has taken nearly a lifetime. From her grandmother's Bible-thumping to her current role as co-director of Chochmat HaLev, *a Jewish renewal center of learning in Berkeley, Calif., she has had to define for herself what it means to be Jewish. This despite sometimes shocking hostility from her Orthodox* shul, *resistance from rabbis, her own resentment at the sexism in Jewish life, and her Christian family's sometimes upsetting responses to her conversion.*



DENNIS FRANCIS, COURTESY LONG ISLAND JEWISH WORLD

The phrase "we Jews" felt especially strange to me. Although I had gone to the *mikveh*, could I legitimately say I belonged to the Jewish people? The spiritual dimension of the conversion caused me no difficulty, but the ethnic part made me uneasy and self-conscious.

When I wrote the draft of my publisher's column for the first issue of Tikkun, I crossed out a sentence that began, "We, the Jewish people." In my mind it sounded too formal, but the deeper reason was that I didn't yet feel entitled to publicly make such a proclamation.

That spring a telephone call came from my father. This was a big event because he and I hardly spoke, even though we lived near each other.

My father had divorced my mother several years before, immediately marrying again. His new wife kept him from having contact with his previous family. We, his children and grandchildren, had been cast off like unwanted baggage, and this brought us pain. Why didn't he do something about this situation, we asked ourselves. His wife's pressure was the easiest explanation, but we could not ignore the message of rejection behind his passivity.

When the phone rang that day, I answered it with the usual, "Tikkun, may I help you?" On the other end of the line I heard only labored breathing. "Hello? Hello?" I called impatiently.

"Nan?" a voice finally said. "Is that you?"

I recognized him immediately. "Dad?" I replied, flooded with feeling. "What a surprise."

A long pause. "I hear you're Jewish."

"Yes, that's right." How he found out, I could not imagine. My mind raced with all the things I wanted to say, but I did not trust myself.

"The kids are okay?" he asked.

"Yes, they're fine." I gave him a brief rundown of colleges, jobs, and my daughter's marriage six months before.

Another pause before he spoke again. "Our dog Daisy's been sick. I have to feed her by hand."

"That's too bad," I replied. How could he speak of his dog when there was such disruption between us? For a moment my anger rose, but then my love for this man, and my sorrow in what had happened between us, caused my throat to constrict.

"You're okay, Pa?" I asked. "You know if you ever need anything, I'll be there. I miss you so much."

Again the long pause. "All religions are the same," he said, his voice so low I had to strain to hear his words. "Christian, Jew, whatever. It doesn't matter what you are."

With that, he abruptly hung up the telephone before I could say anything more, disappearing into the unfriendly territory of his own life. . . .

My children supported me, but my mother, who still lived in the family home, was not pleased with my new life. It was bad enough that I was with Michael, whom she did not understand, but I also had become a Jew.

When I had told her I was going to convert, she shook her head sadly. "I thought you used to like going to church."

"I did," I said, "but now I'm different." My attempts to explain why I was making this change did not help, and she began to tell me how she felt about my new religion. *Shabbat* was restrictive, but the worst was *kashrut,* the Jewish dietary laws. She could not grasp why anyone, much less her daughter, would follow this narrow-minded practice.

I knew that my mother's feelings about *kashrut* were connected to my turning down her food. No matter how gently I did it, I still was rejecting her, or so it seemed. Food and love were tied together in a primal way. . . .

A few weeks after my conversion, my mother invited me for Easter. "You must come," she said. "We're having a honey-baked ham."

Food was the most obvious problem with the holiday celebration, although I could have brought my own or eaten just the vegetables, enduring her disapproval. But I was a new Jew, and didn't want to have anything to do with Easter. I was the most troublesome Christian holiday, with its imagery of Jesus on the cross and its accusation of Jewish responsibility. Even if I didn't go to church, the day had too many anti-Semitic associations. Besides, it came in the middle of my first Passover season as a Jew.

"I don't celebrate Easter now," I told my mother. "I'm not comfortable with it."

"What do you mean? You're part of the family."

(continued on page 43)